



DARK DAYS

1

THE FLASH

PRELUDE TO

MEET



Snyder
Tynion IV
Lee
Hubert
Romita Jr.
Williams
Janson
Miki
Sinclair

**THE BLACK RACER
AND SHILO NORMAN
SPECIAL #1**

Written by REGINALD
HUDLIN
Art and cover by
DENYS COWAN



**THE NEW GODS
SPECIAL #1**

Written by
SHANE DAVIS
Art by
SHANE DAVIS
Plus a NEW
bonus story by
Walter Simonson



**THE SANDMAN
SPECIAL #1**

Written by
DAN JURGENS
and STEVE ORLANDO
Art by
JON BODGANOVE
and RICK LEONARDI
with cover by PAUL POPE



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and cover by BRUCE TIMM
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Sam Humphries and Steve Rude



**THE NEWSBOY LEGION
AND THE BOY COMMANDOS
SPECIAL #1**

Written by
HOWARD CHAYKIN
Art and cover by
HOWARD CHAYKIN

AVAILABLE IN AUGUST





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THE FLASHING

PRELUDE TO

METAL

**Snyder
Tynion IV
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RATED **T+** TEEN PLUS DCCOMICS.COM SEP 2017



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JR
SINCE

*In Cairo, they had called me
an adventurer. In Athens they
called me a philosopher.*



*But at my small museum in the
quiet American city of St. Roch
in the first decades of the
twentieth century, I was
an archaeologist.*



*The job itself never changed. The
human story is a mystery told by a
billion unreliable narrators, and for
the duration of our species I
have been nothing more
than a detective.*

THE EGYPTIAN WING

The Jewels of Nabu
Kandhaqi Artifacts



THE TOMB OF CHAY-ARA



*The mission was always the
same. To carry forward the
torch of discovery and reveal
the secrets hiding in the
darkest shadows.*



*The truth buried deep
beneath millennia of
human memory.*

We had found them over many lifetimes,
lurking out of sight in human history,
unchanging, all-seeing.

We had long heard rumors of the
Rhyming Demon of Camelot. Brothers
who kept secrets and mysteries. The
man as old as America. The grove of
ancient humanoid plants. Of Sorcerers,
Shining Knights, Cavemen, and
Phantom Strangers of all stripes.

DARK DAYS THE CASTING

SCOTT SNYDER & JAMES TYNION IV **writers**
JIM LEE, ANDY KUBERT & JOHN ROMITA JR. **pencils**
SCOTT WILLIAMS, KLAUS JANSON & DANNY MIKI **inks**
ALEX SINCLAIR & JEREMIAH SKIPPER **color**
STEVE WANDS **letters**
LEE, WILLIAMS & SINCLAIR **cover**
KUBERT & BRAD ANDERSON **variant cover**
JOHN ROMITA JR., MIKI & SINCLAIR **variant cover**
DAVE WIELGOSZ **assistant editor**
REBECCA TAYLOR **associate editor**
MARK DOYLE **editor**
BATMAN created by BOB KANE with BILL FINGER.
Wonder Woman created by WILLIAM MCULTON MARSTON

None had ever
thought to bring
them together.

The Immortals.

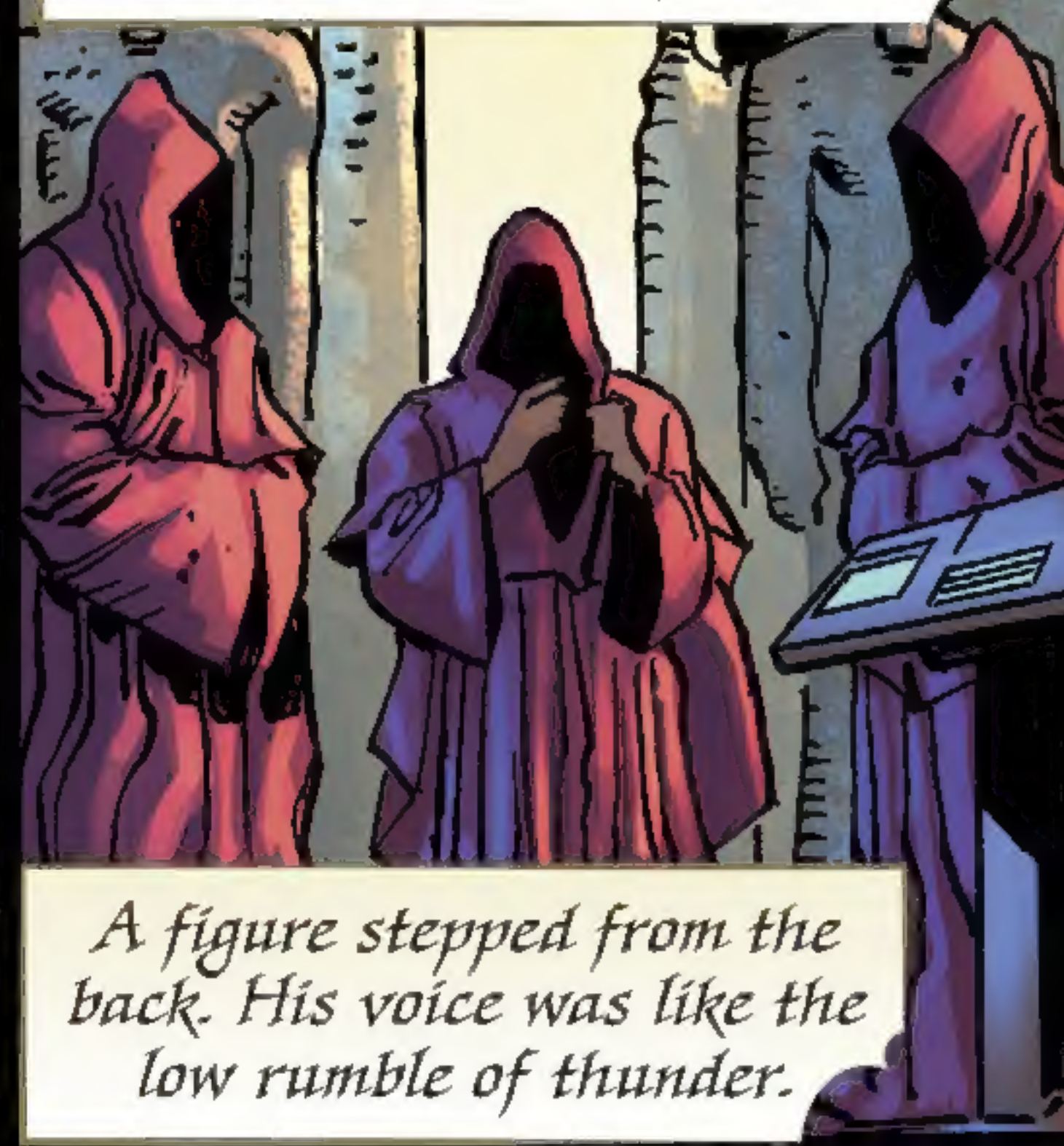
I told them what I now knew.
That our lives did not begin
in Egypt. That they began
generations earlier...The dark
priest Hath-Set, he had not
cast us down this path of
reincarnation.



He had taken
our *pasts* away
from us.



He had *obscured* the truth
behind the metal we wore in our
wings and belts in service of
something darker than any
mortal could comprehend.



A figure stepped from the
back. His voice was like the
low rumble of thunder.

He spoke of the
metal that changed
everything, and the
terrible being that
it had brought
forth.



The being from beyond all
our understanding.

AL GHUL...
DO YOU SEE WHAT
I SEE?

YES,
MS. SEWARD.
I DO.

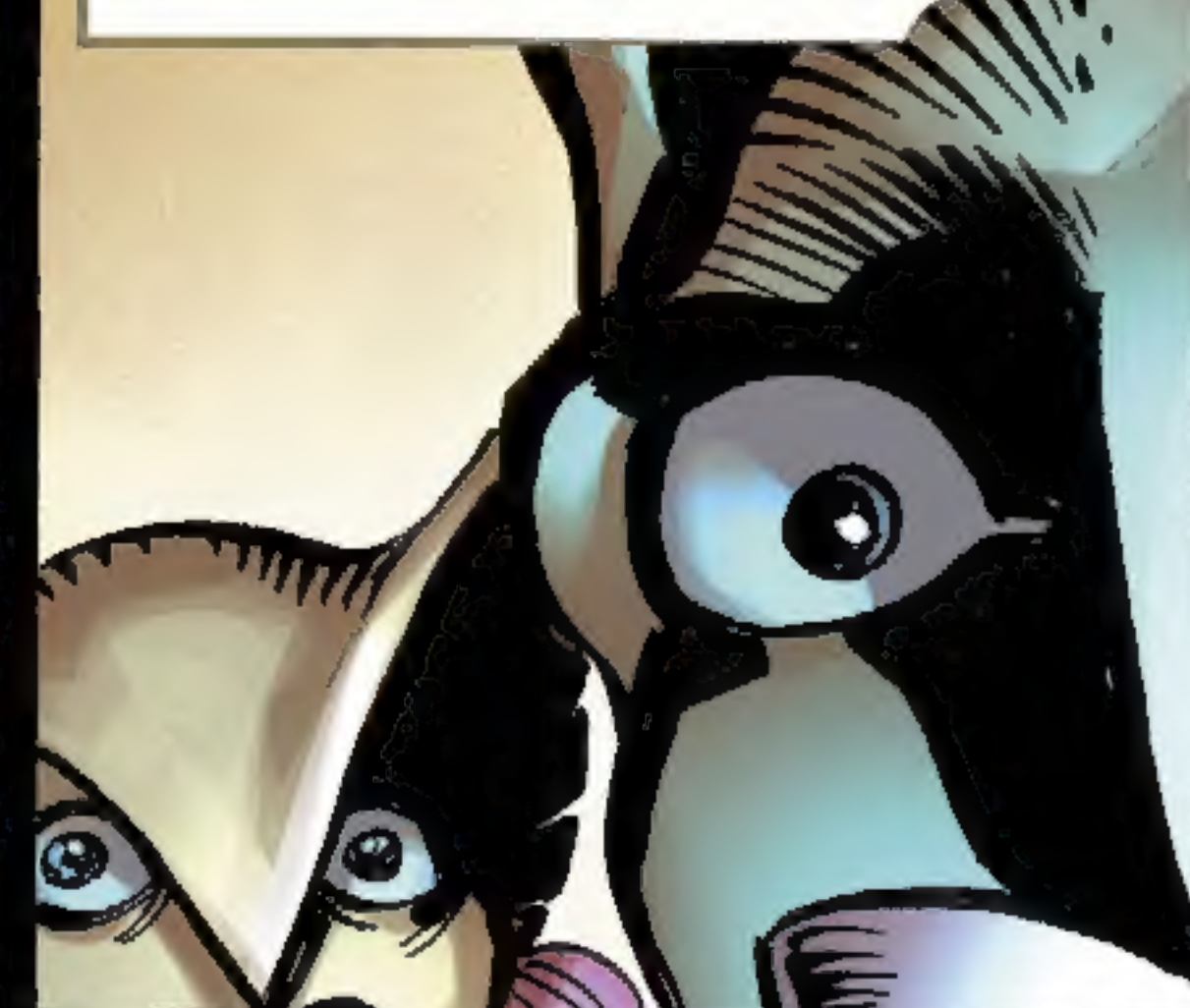


The being that was cast
out, and sought desperately
to return.

To tear down all that
was light in the world,
and drag it into the
dark.



And the truth would hit
us like lightning.



METHANA, GREECE.

SNRRRRRRRR



ENOUGH, AMPHITRION.

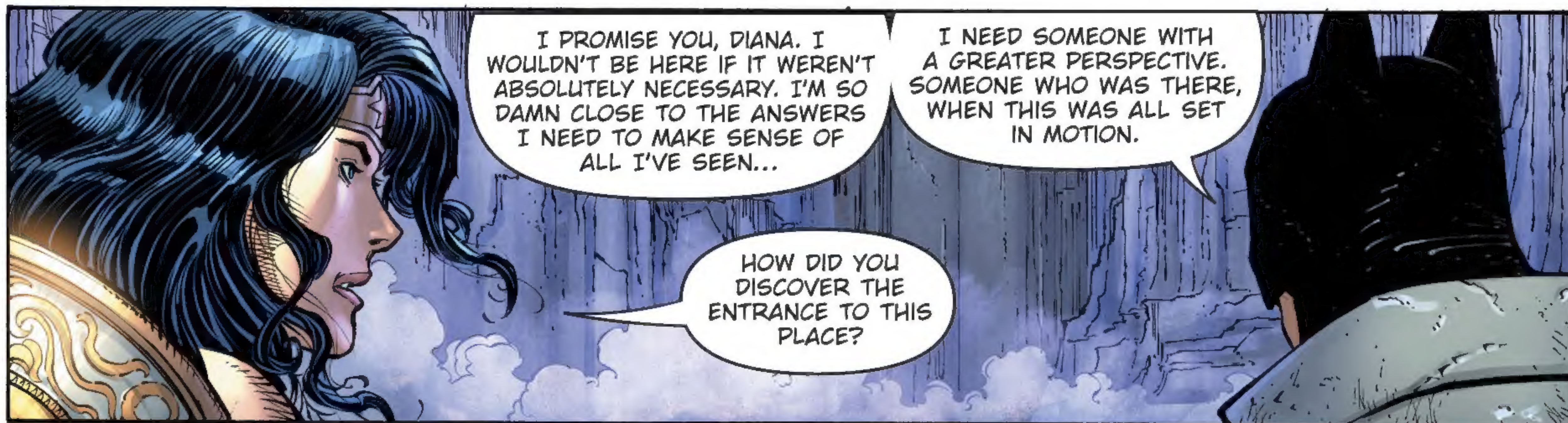
THIS HUMAN FALLS UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THEMYSCIRA.



I AM CERTAIN BATMAN WAS ABOUT TO POLITELY ASK FOR SAFE PASSAGE TO YOUR PATRON'S TEMPLE.

(I WAS GOING TO DO THAT NEXT.)

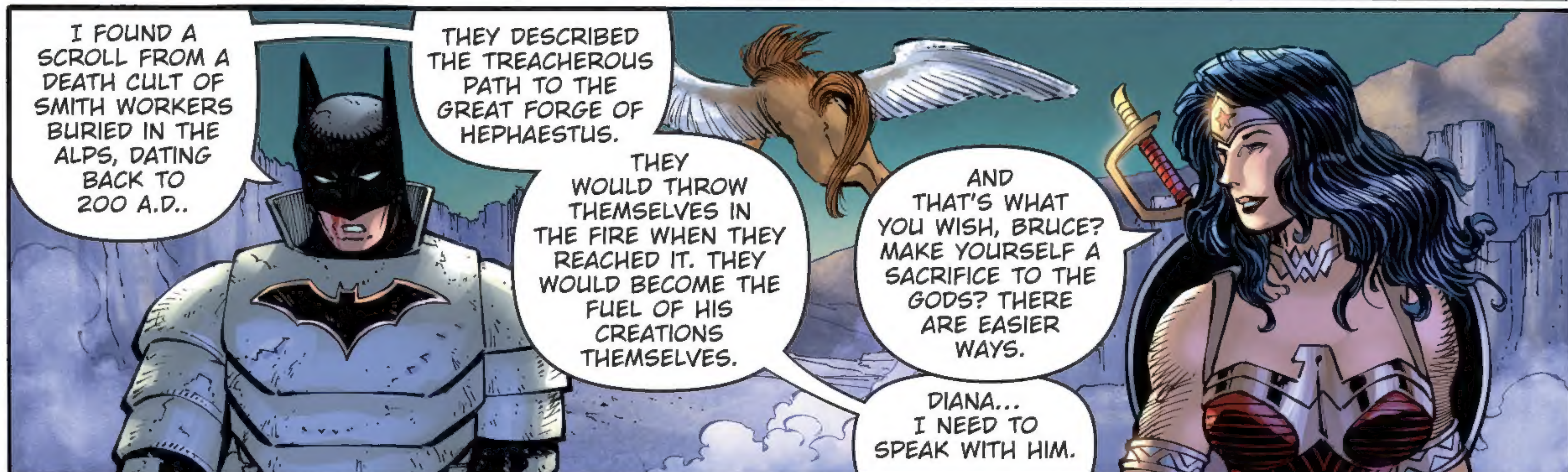
YOU SHOULD HAVE CALLED ME, BRUCE. THIS IS NOT A PART OF THE WORLD ANY MORTAL SHOULD WALK ALONE.



I PROMISE YOU, DIANA. I WOULDN'T BE HERE IF IT WEREN'T ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY. I'M SO DAMN CLOSE TO THE ANSWERS I NEED TO MAKE SENSE OF ALL I'VE SEEN...

I NEED SOMEONE WITH A GREATER PERSPECTIVE. SOMEONE WHO WAS THERE, WHEN THIS WAS ALL SET IN MOTION.

HOW DID YOU DISCOVER THE ENTRANCE TO THIS PLACE?



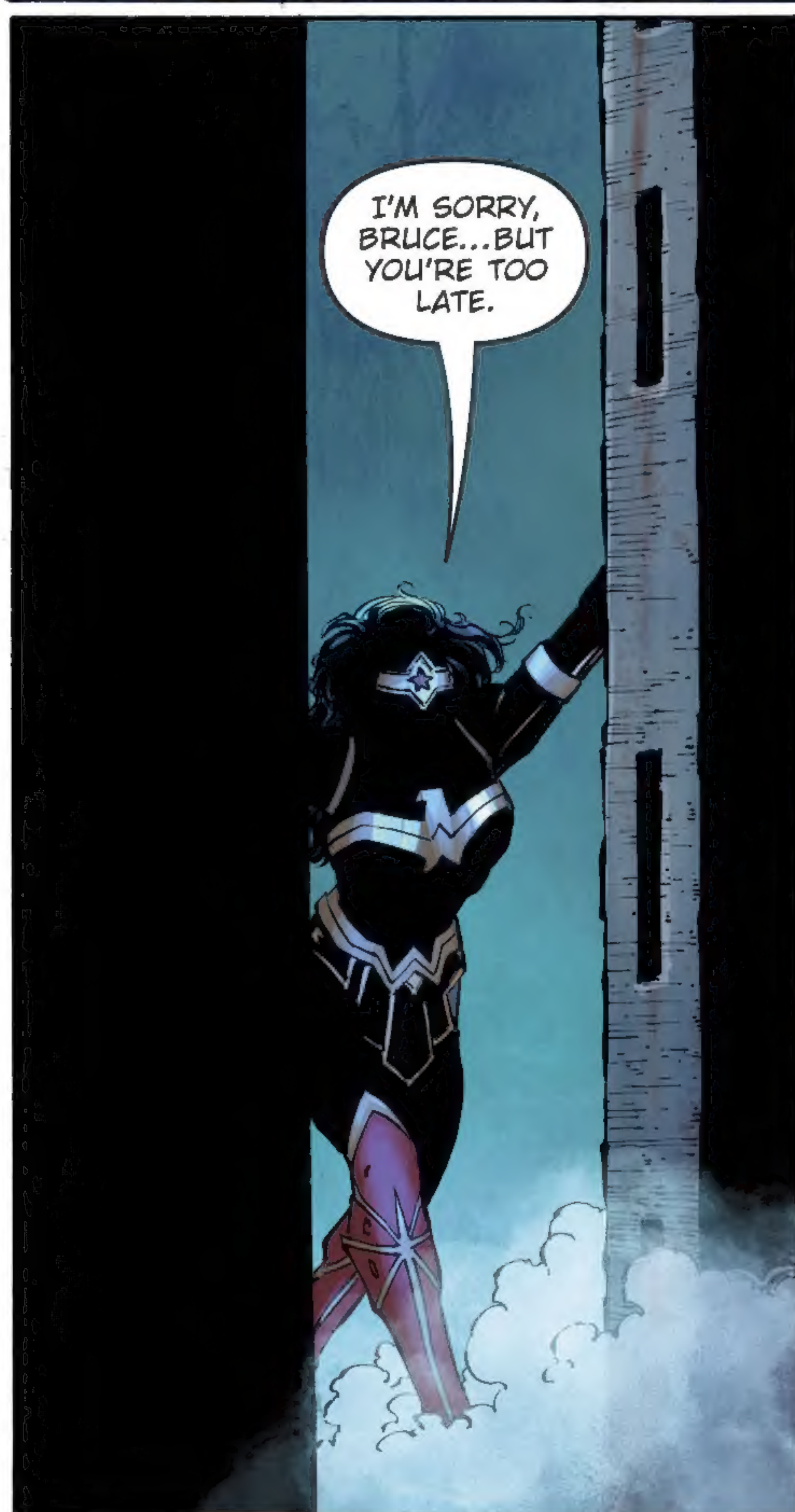
I FOUND A SCROLL FROM A DEATH CULT OF SMITH WORKERS BURIED IN THE ALPS, DATING BACK TO 200 A.D..

THEY DESCRIBED THE TREACHEROUS PATH TO THE GREAT FORGE OF HEPHAESTUS.

THEY WOULD THROW THEMSELVES IN THE FIRE WHEN THEY REACHED IT. THEY WOULD BECOME THE FUEL OF HIS CREATIONS THEMSELVES.

AND THAT'S WHAT YOU WISH, BRUCE? MAKE YOURSELF A SACRIFICE TO THE GODS? THERE ARE EASIER WAYS.

DIANA... I NEED TO SPEAK WITH HIM.

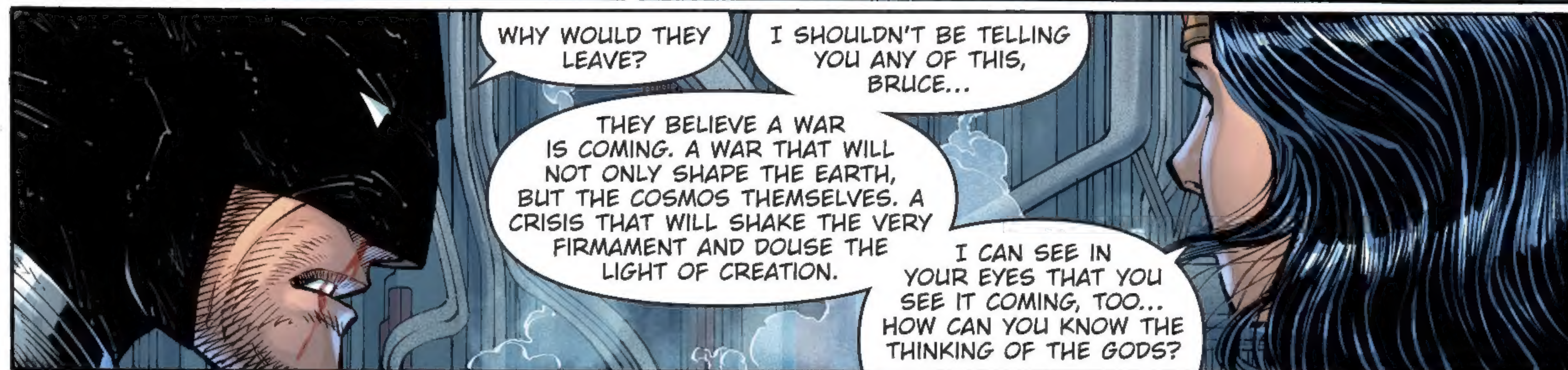


I'M SORRY, BRUCE... BUT YOU'RE TOO LATE.



THE GODS HAVE ABANDONED EARTH.

THEY HAVE BARRED THE GATES OF OLYMPUS BEHIND THEM.

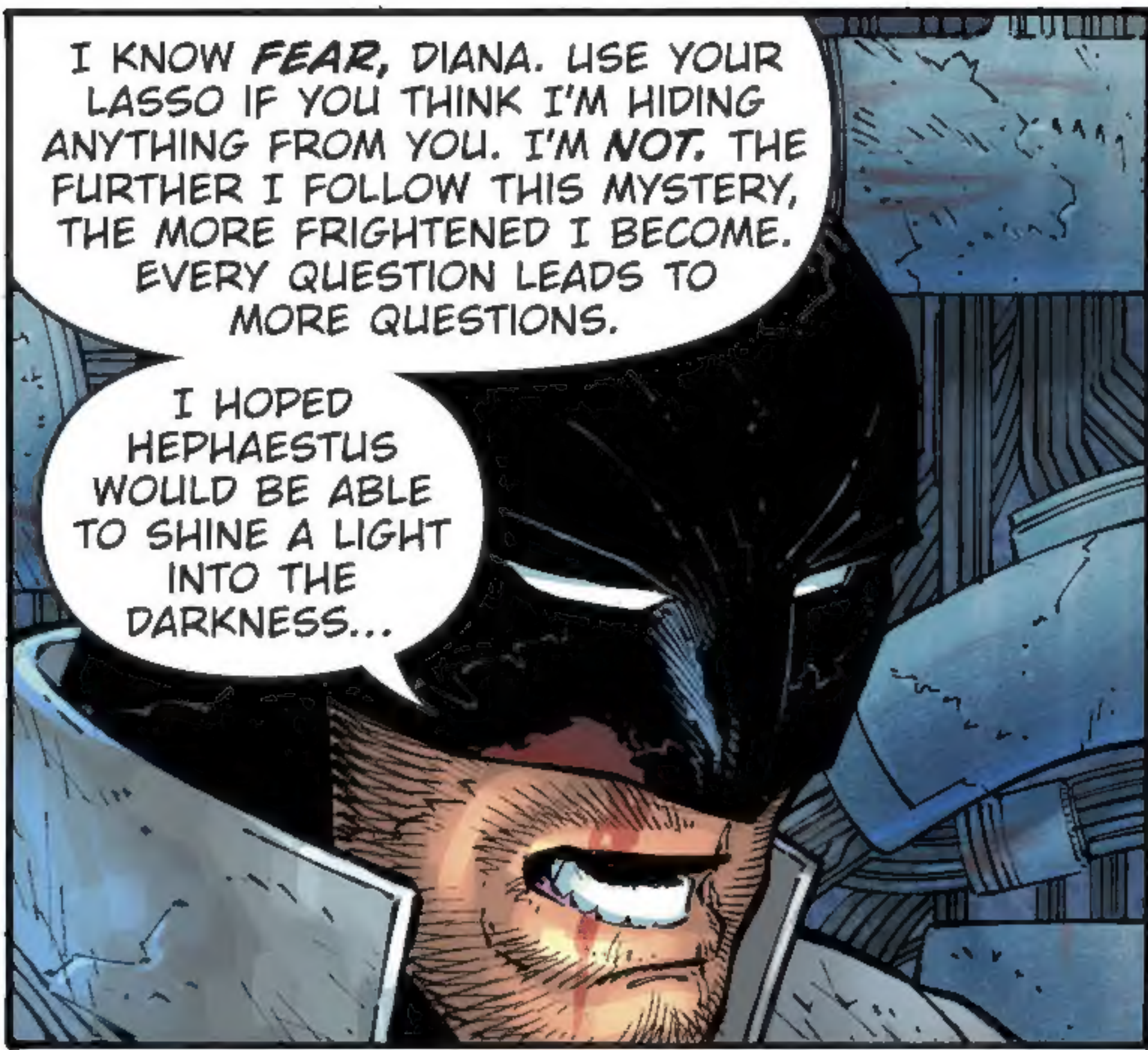


WHY WOULD THEY LEAVE?

I SHOULDN'T BE TELLING YOU ANY OF THIS, BRUCE...

THEY BELIEVE A WAR IS COMING. A WAR THAT WILL NOT ONLY SHAPE THE EARTH, BUT THE COSMOS THEMSELVES. A CRISIS THAT WILL SHAKE THE VERY FIRMAMENT AND DOUSE THE LIGHT OF CREATION.

I CAN SEE IN YOUR EYES THAT YOU SEE IT COMING, TOO... HOW CAN YOU KNOW THE THINKING OF THE GODS?



I KNOW **FEAR**, DIANA. USE YOUR LASSO IF YOU THINK I'M HIDING ANYTHING FROM YOU. I'M **NOT**. THE FURTHER I FOLLOW THIS MYSTERY, THE MORE FRIGHTENED I BECOME. EVERY QUESTION LEADS TO MORE QUESTIONS.

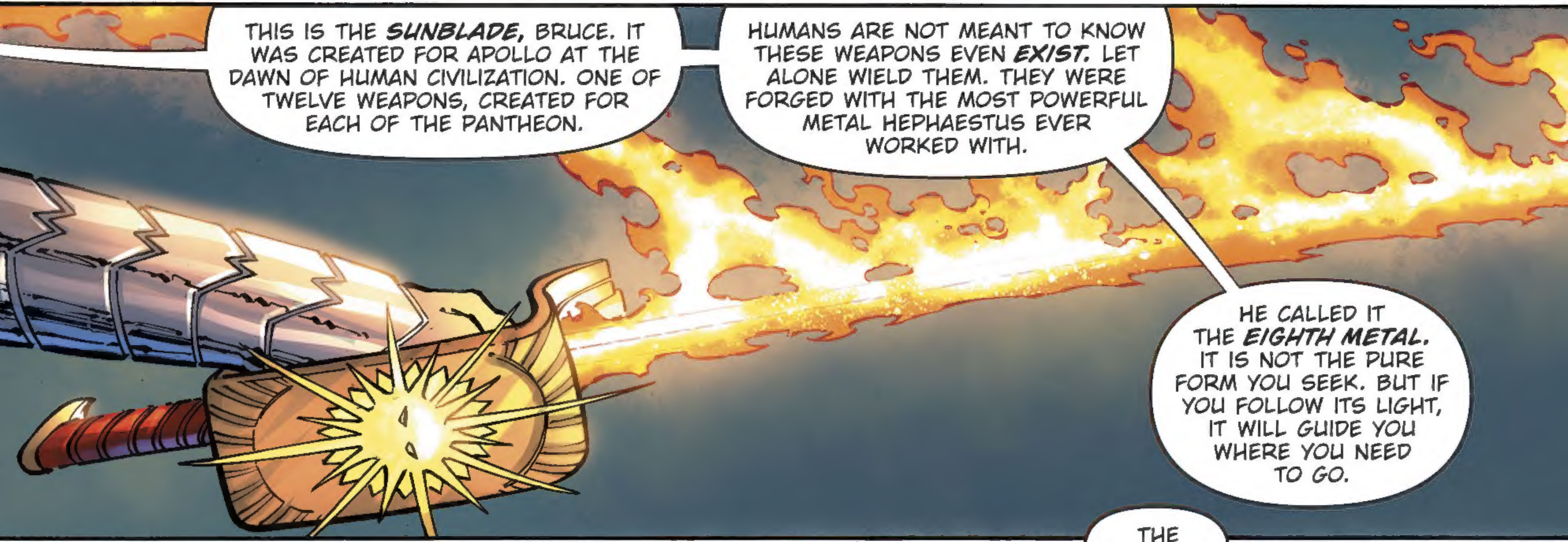
I HOPED HEPHAESTUS WOULD BE ABLE TO SHINE A LIGHT INTO THE DARKNESS...



HE MAY STILL.

BEFORE I CAME TO YOU I HAD A VISION. THE GREAT HOUND, WAR-FORM OF HEPHAESTUS, SAT BEFORE ME WITH EYES OF FIRE AND TOLD ME I WOULD NEED TO COME HERE.

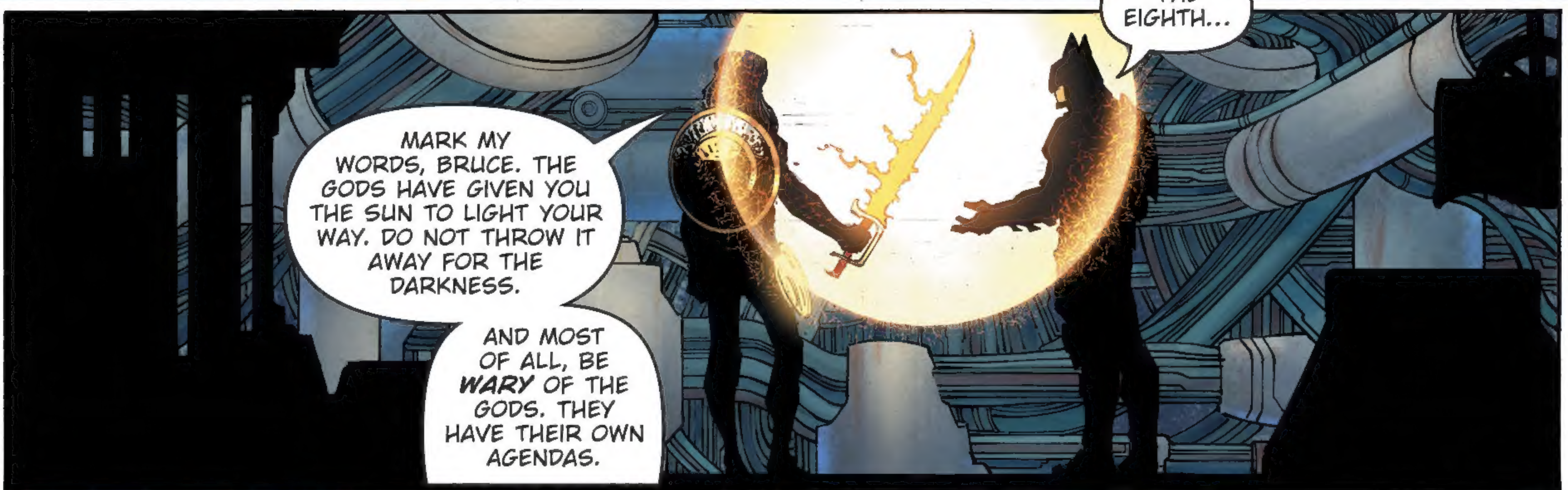
AND THAT I WOULD NEED TO GIVE YOU THIS.



THIS IS THE **SUNBLADE**, BRUCE. IT WAS CREATED FOR APOLLO AT THE DAWN OF HUMAN CIVILIZATION. ONE OF TWELVE WEAPONS, CREATED FOR EACH OF THE PANTHEON.

HUMANS ARE NOT MEANT TO KNOW THESE WEAPONS EVEN **EXIST**. LET ALONE WIELD THEM. THEY WERE FORGED WITH THE MOST POWERFUL METAL HEPHAESTUS EVER WORKED WITH.

HE CALLED IT THE **EIGHTH METAL**. IT IS NOT THE PURE FORM YOU SEEK. BUT IF YOU FOLLOW ITS LIGHT, IT WILL GUIDE YOU WHERE YOU NEED TO GO.



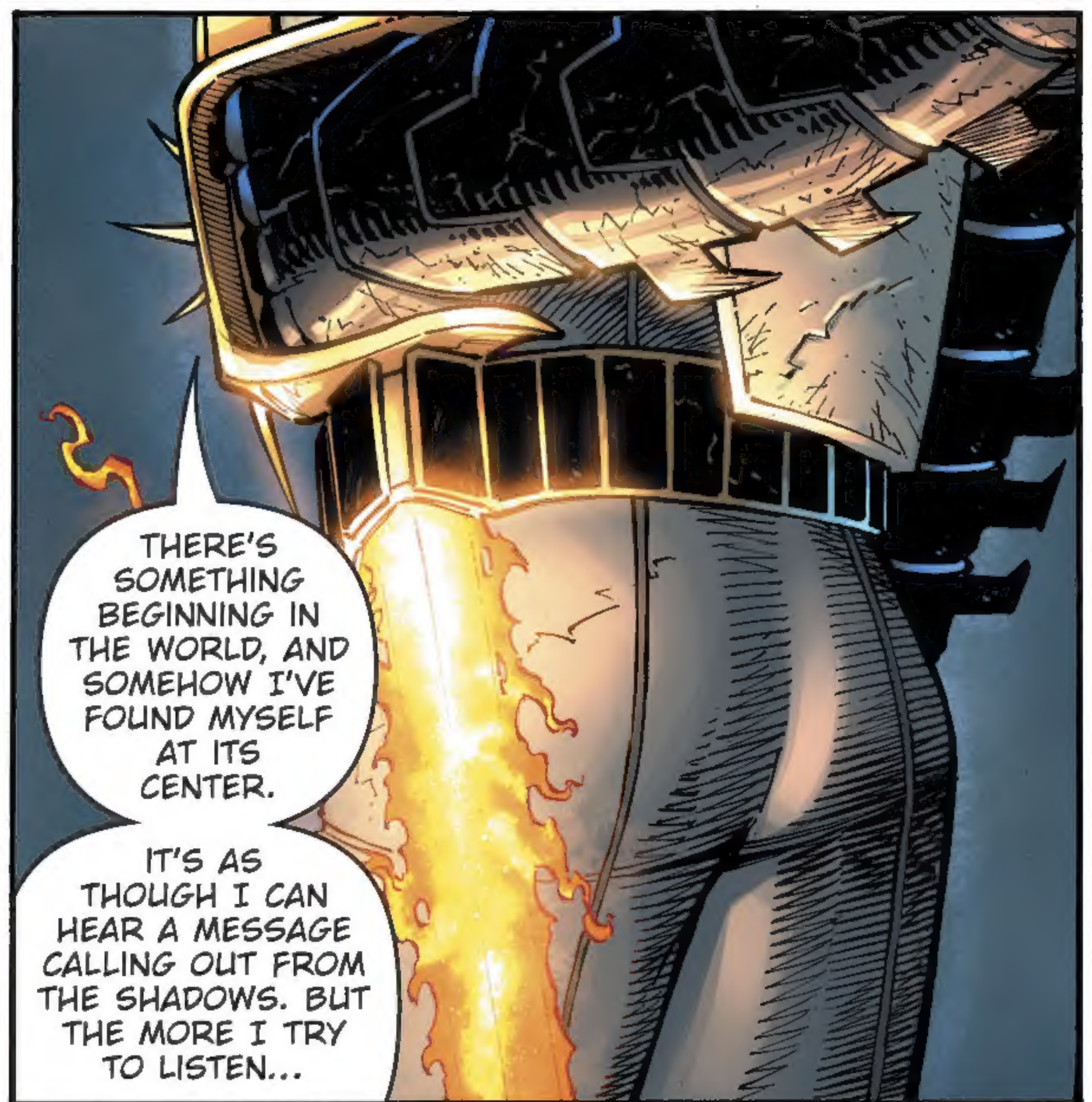
MARK MY WORDS, BRUCE. THE GODS HAVE GIVEN YOU THE SUN TO LIGHT YOUR WAY. DO NOT THROW IT AWAY FOR THE DARKNESS.

AND MOST OF ALL, BE **WARY** OF THE GODS. THEY HAVE THEIR OWN AGENDAS.

THE EIGHTH...



SO DO I.



THERE'S SOMETHING BEGINNING IN THE WORLD, AND SOMEHOW I'VE FOUND MYSELF AT ITS CENTER.

IT'S AS THOUGH I CAN HEAR A MESSAGE CALLING OUT FROM THE SHADOWS. BUT THE MORE I TRY TO LISTEN...

THE BATCAVE. GOTHAM CITY.

"...THE MORE IT SOUNDS
LIKE LAUGHTER."

HEHEHEHEHE...

DO YOU SEE THE BIG
PICTURE, YET, GREEN LANTERN,
OR AM I GOING TO HAVE TO
SPELL IT ALL OUT FOR YOU
IN BIG PLAIN LETTERS?

WE'VE LISTENED TO
ENOUGH OF YOUR INSANITY,
JOKER. THERE ISN'T A SINGLE
REASON WE SHOULD TRUST A
DAMN WORD YOU SAY.

JUST
THINKING ABOUT
BATMAN LOCKING
YOU AWAY DOWN
HERE FOR GOD
KNOWS HOW
LONG...

TRUST
ME, G.L. I'M
GOING TO HAVE
A TALK WITH
BATMAN WHEN
HE GETS
BACK.

WHY SO ANGRY,
DUKE? IS IT BECAUSE
YOU'RE THE ALSO-RAN?
THE NOT-GOOD-ENOUGH-
TO-GET-THE-REAL-JOB
ROBIN?

OR IS IT BECAUSE
THE LAST TIME I SAW YOU I
POISONED YOUR PARENTS PAST
THE BRINK OF SANITY AND TRIED
TO HAVE THEM SHOT RIGHT IN
FRONT OF YOUR
IMPRESSIONABLE EYES?

HAHAHA
HAHHAHA
HAHA!

I'LL...
I'LL HURT
YOU...

GET BACK, DUKE...
YOU DON'T WANT TO
MESS WITH THAT
ENERGY FIELD!



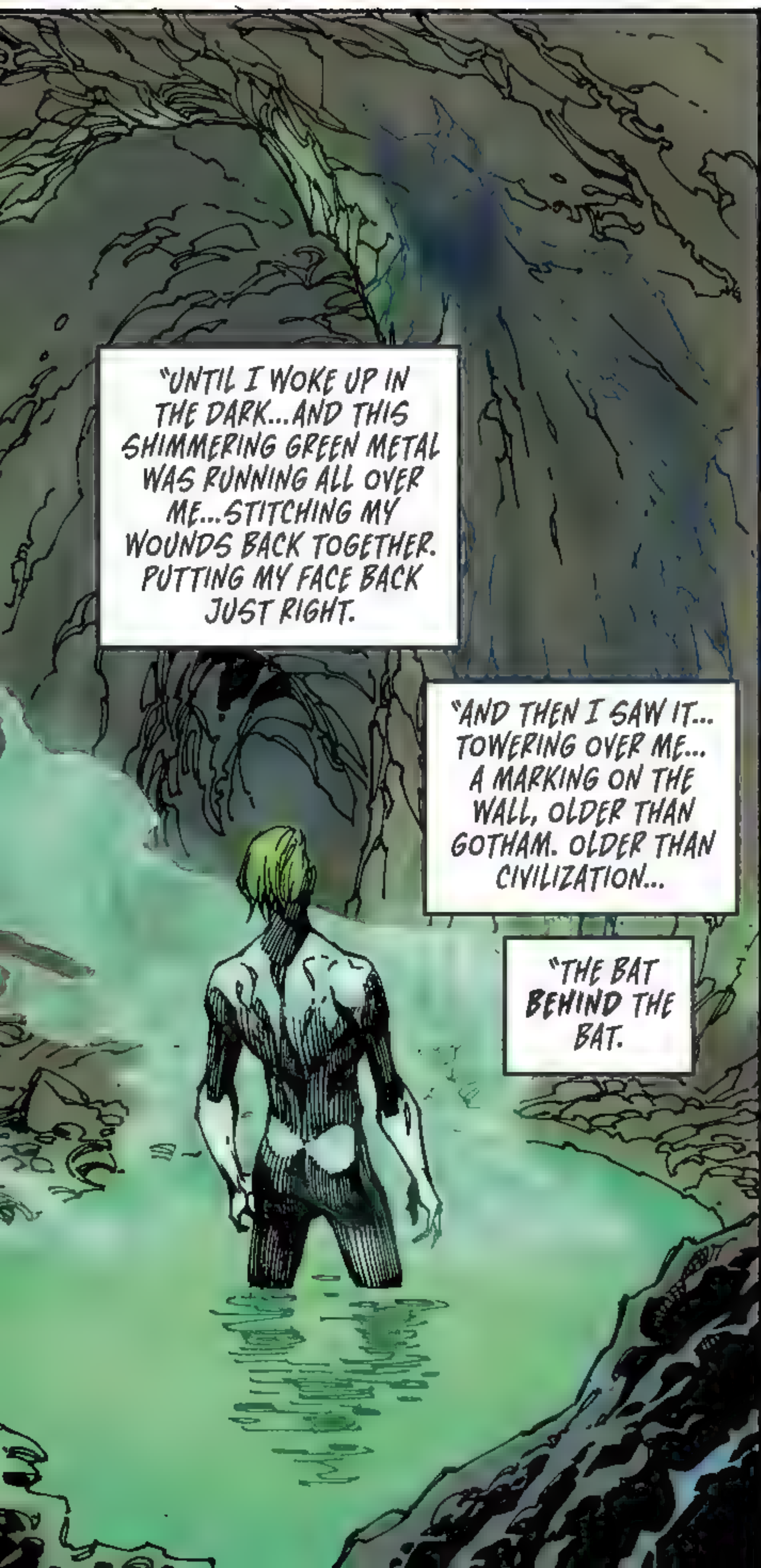
HAHAHAHAHA...

SEE, I HAVEN'T HAD FUN LIKE THIS IN AGES.



THAT'S HOW IT ALL STARTED, YOU KNOW. A BIT OF FUN. I CUT OFF MY FACE AND THOUGHT I'D KILL HIS WHOLE FAMILY. YOU KNOW HOW IT IS. GET RID OF THE KIDS AND REKINDLE THE ROMANCE. THE OLD FLAME.

BUT IT TURNS OUT HE LIKES THE BRATS, SO THERE I WAS TUMBLING DOWN INTO THE DARK OF THE DEEPEST CORNER OF THE BATCAVE, AND SPLASH, I MUST ADMIT, I THOUGHT I WAS A GONER...



"UNTIL I WOKE UP IN THE DARK...AND THIS SHIMMERING GREEN METAL WAS RUNNING ALL OVER ME...STITCHING MY WOUNDS BACK TOGETHER. PUTTING MY FACE BACK JUST RIGHT.

"AND THEN I SAW IT... TOWERING OVER ME... A MARKING ON THE WALL, OLDER THAN GOTHAM. OLDER THAN CIVILIZATION...

"THE BAT BEHIND THE BAT.

I NEEDED TO KNOW MORE... AND THERE WERE PEOPLE, THEY KNEW...THE OWLS KNEW...THAT LUNATIC CRAZY QUILT KNEW...



YOU SEE? IT WAS ALL A GREAT CONSPIRACY. THE PIECES PLANTED FOR GENERATIONS. BIRDS HAD BECOME BATS. LIGHT HAD BECOME DARK. SANITY HAD BECOME INSANITY.

IT WAS COMING. I COULD FEEL IT IN ME. EVEN WHEN I WASN'T MYSELF, I COULD STILL FEEL IT IN MY HEAD. AN ECHO IN THE SHADOWS CALLING THE REAL ME BACK TO THE SURFACE...

I'M SURE YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN, DUKE. YOU MUST HAVE FELT IT, TOO. YOU'RE PROBABLY FEELING IT NOW...

THAT PESKY LITTLE FORCE FIELD SURE IS REACTING STRANGELY TO YOUR BODY, DON'T YOU THINK?



YOU DID THIS...I DON'T KNOW HOW, YOU KNEW...



THEN
YOU'RE NOT
LISTENING!



IT'S STILL IN ME.
IT'S IN YOU. IT'S ALL
AROUND US!

I JUST NEEDED
TO CREATE A CIRCUIT
TO ESCAPE, AND YOU
DID THE JOB
WONDERFULLY!

NO...
WON'T LET
YOU GET
FREE...



DEFENSIVE
MEASURES
ACTIVATING

CUTTING
POWER TO
SUB-CAVE
ALPHA. SMILE
PROTOCOL IN
EFFECT.

SEE?!
THE DARK
IS COMING.
HA!

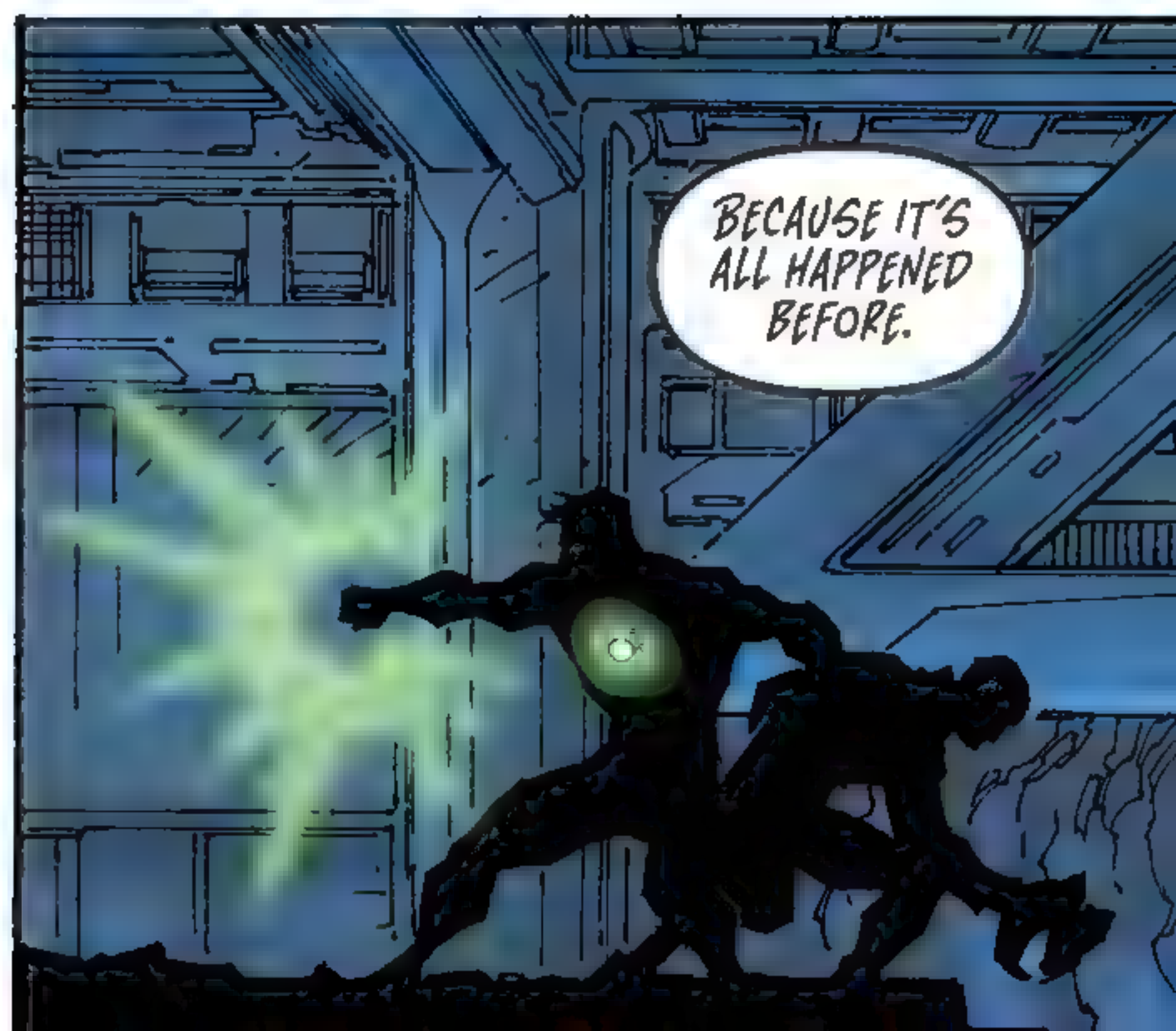
GL! LIGHT
UP THE
ROOM! WE
CAN'T LET HIM
GET AWAY!



DAMMIT, I
CAN'T...RING'S STILL
SHORTING OUT. I DON'T
KNOW WHAT THE HELL
IS HAPPENING.



OH, I KNOW
HOW THIS
STORY IS GOING
TO END.



BECAUSE IT'S
ALL HAPPENED
BEFORE.

The Immortals spoke
of the tribes at the
dawn of man.

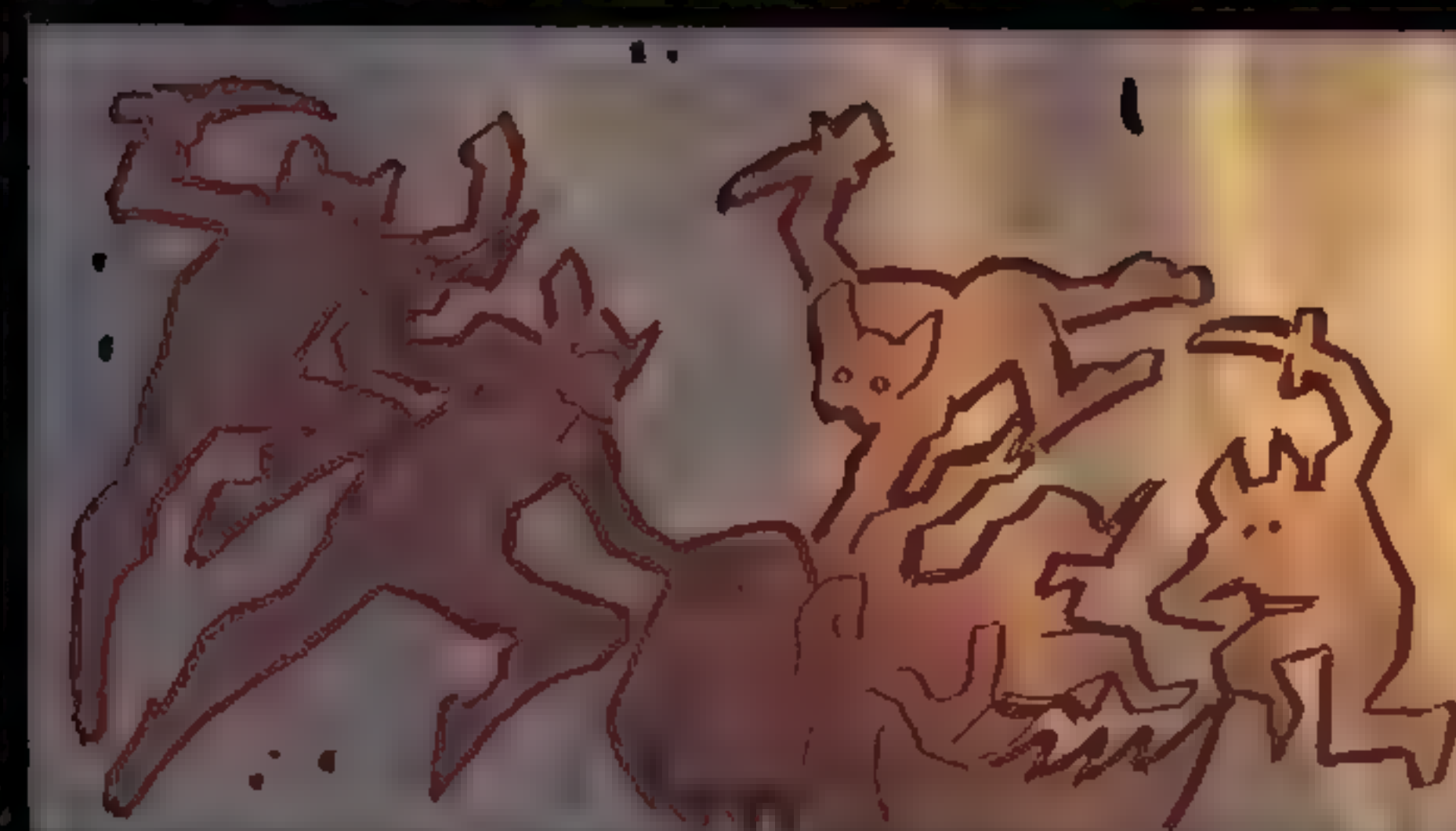


The arrival of the strange
metal that would change
everything, brought to this
world by a tear in the fabric
of reality, and the demon
that rose from the dark and
nearly conquered us all.

At first, we didn't believe. The
scale of what they were telling
us was too huge, too frightening.
We set out to confirm their
story. To find any evidence that
it was all a lie.

But instead, we found
countless paintings on
every continent, hidden in
the deepest cave systems.
All telling the same
dark story.

They spoke of the Hawk Tribe, where my story
had truly begun, though I did not remember it.
They spoke of the betrayal by the Judas of the
birds...who sided with the demon.



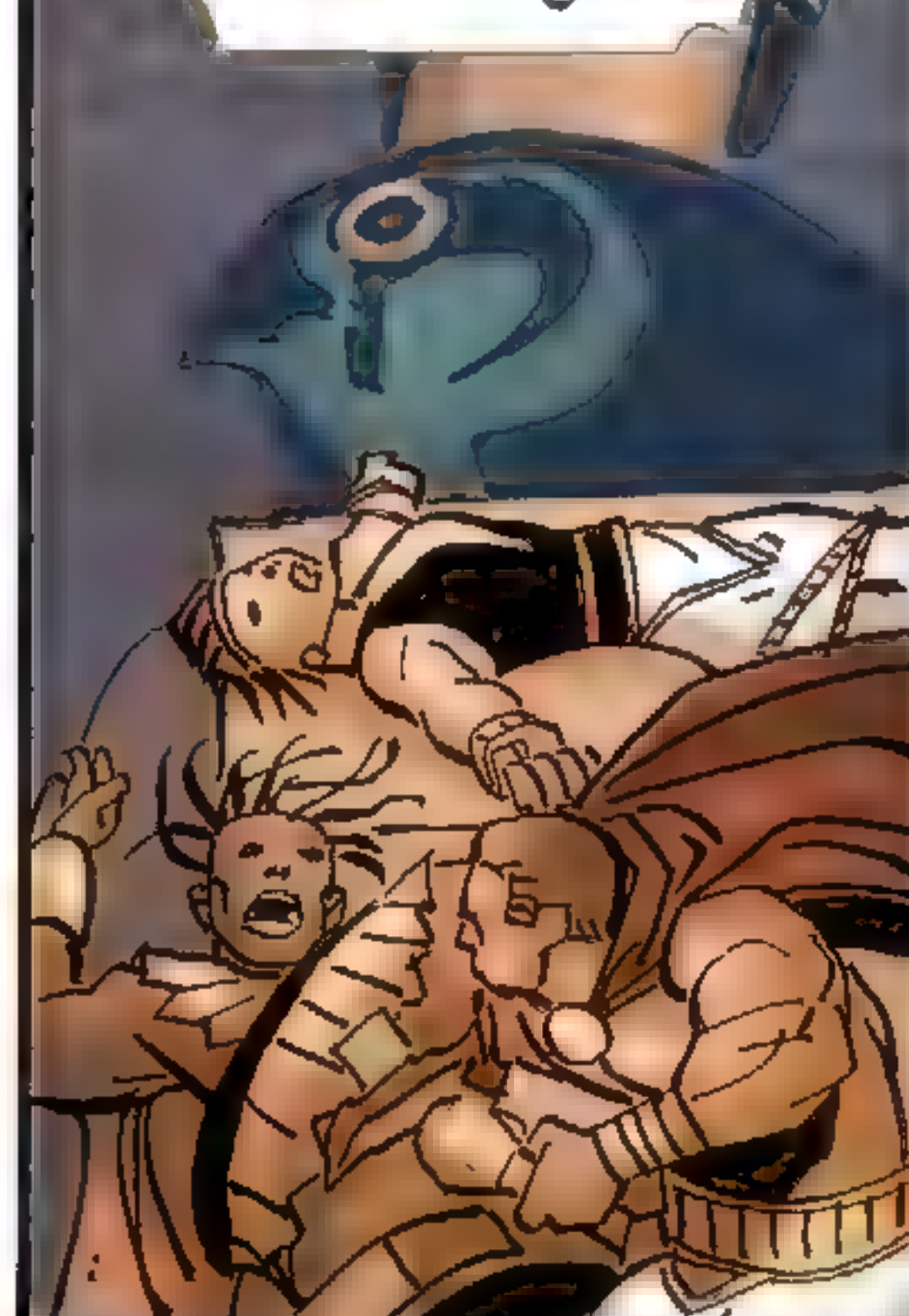
The demon who took
the sigil of the great
and terrible bat.
The plague bringer.
The scourge of
mankind.



My wife and I, we
died fighting it back
into the dark from
whence it came.
Shuttering the door
between its world
and ours.

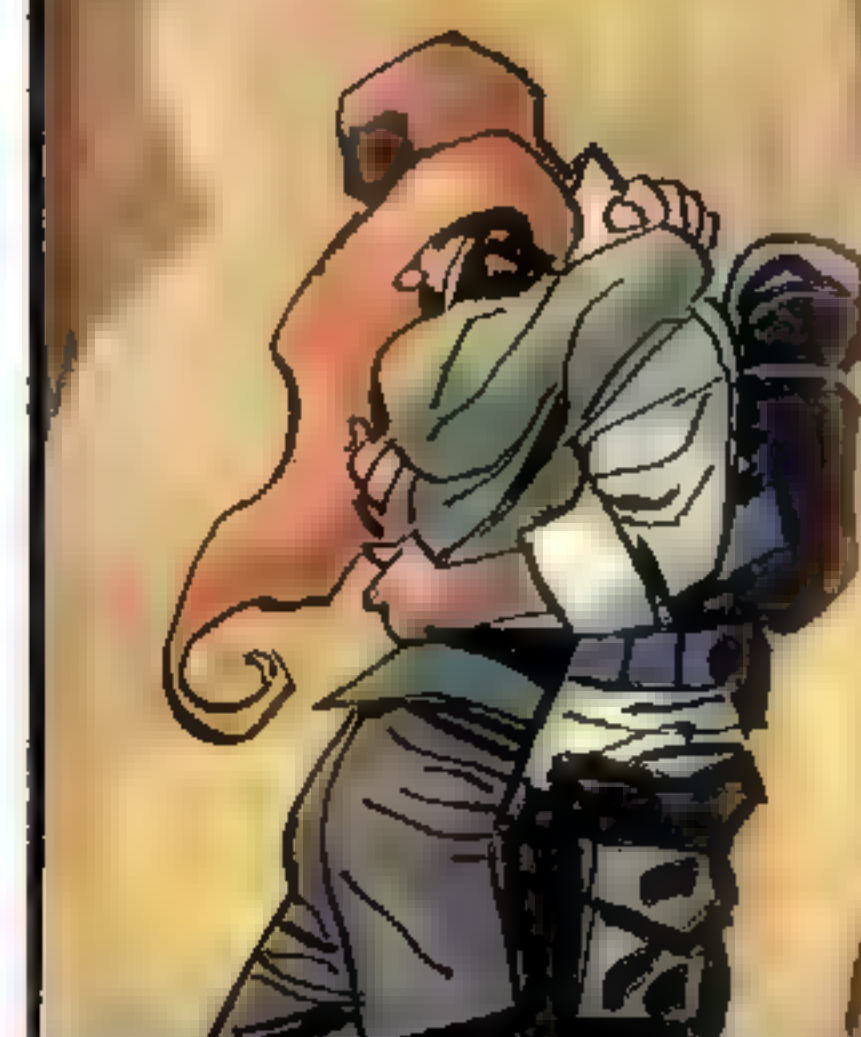


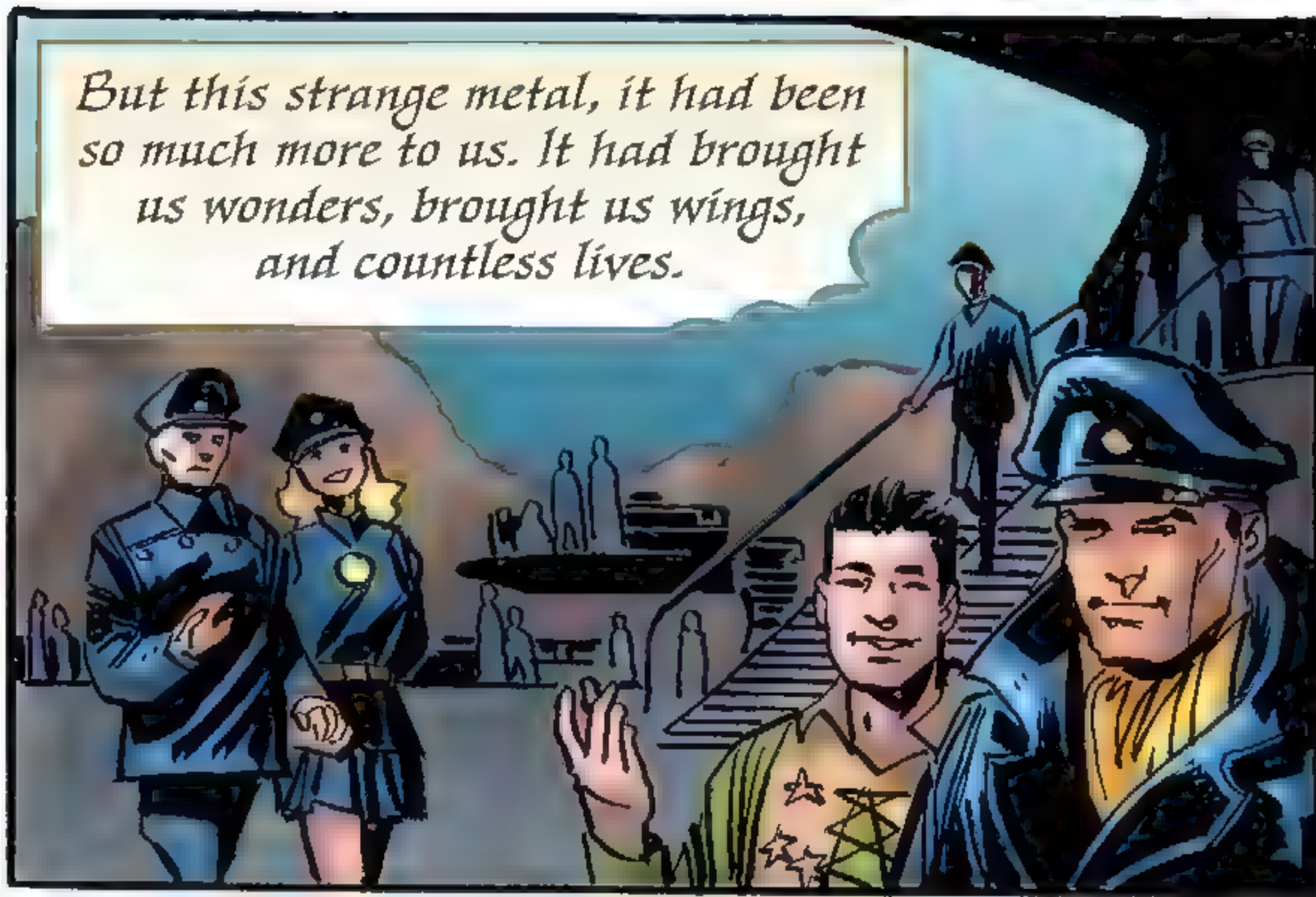
That was the truth
Hath-Set severed us
from by recreating the
scene millennia later.
He, the emissary of
the same dark forces
that nearly fell
humanity before it
could begin.



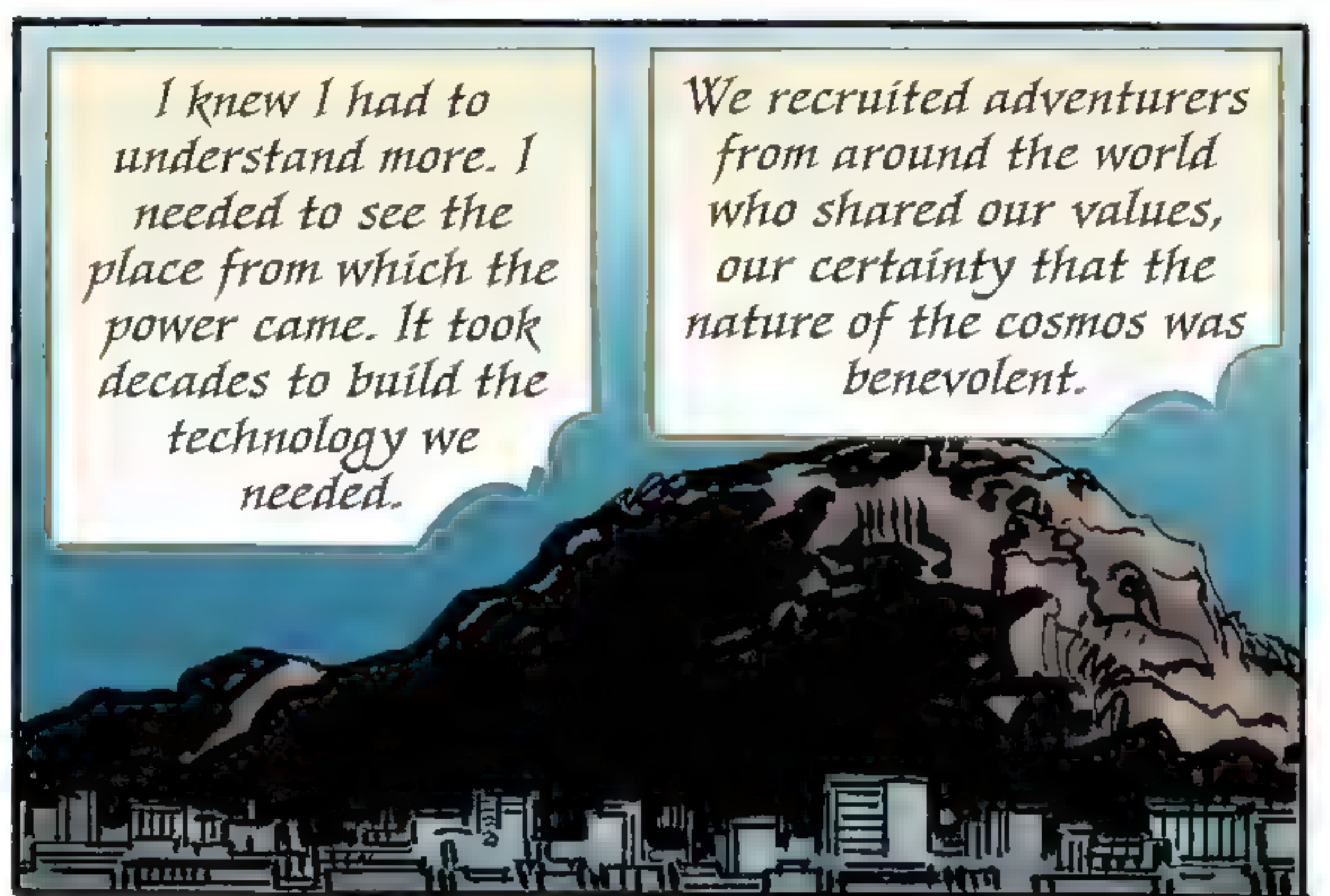
Birds and Bats,
forever at war.

The Immortals told
us the metal was
cursed. It needed to
be eliminated, as its
power came from the
same darkness that
begat this great
destroyer.





But this strange metal, it had been so much more to us. It had brought us wonders, brought us wings, and countless lives.

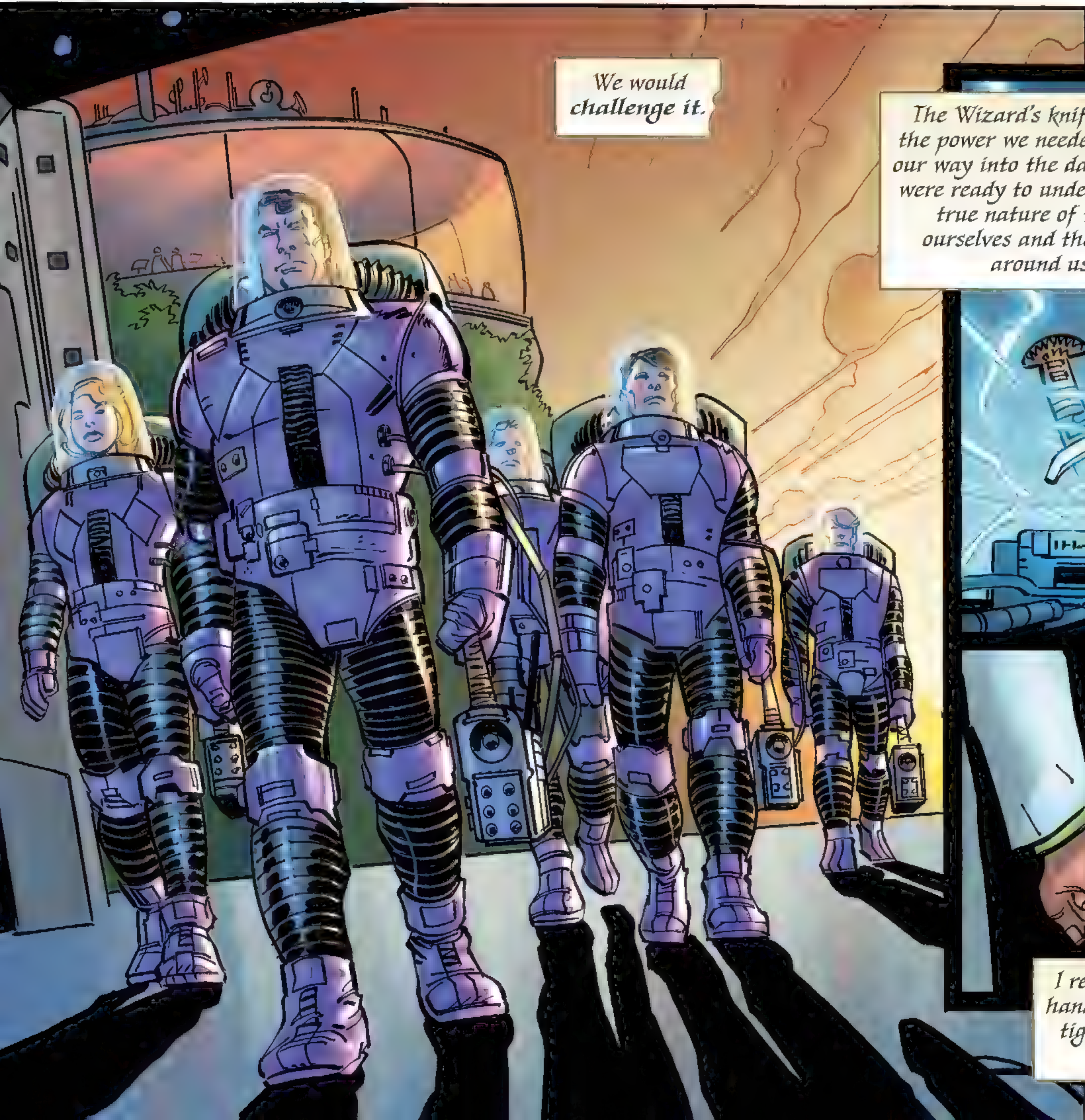


I knew I had to understand more. I needed to see the place from which the power came. It took decades to build the technology we needed.

We recruited adventurers from around the world who shared our values, our certainty that the nature of the cosmos was benevolent.

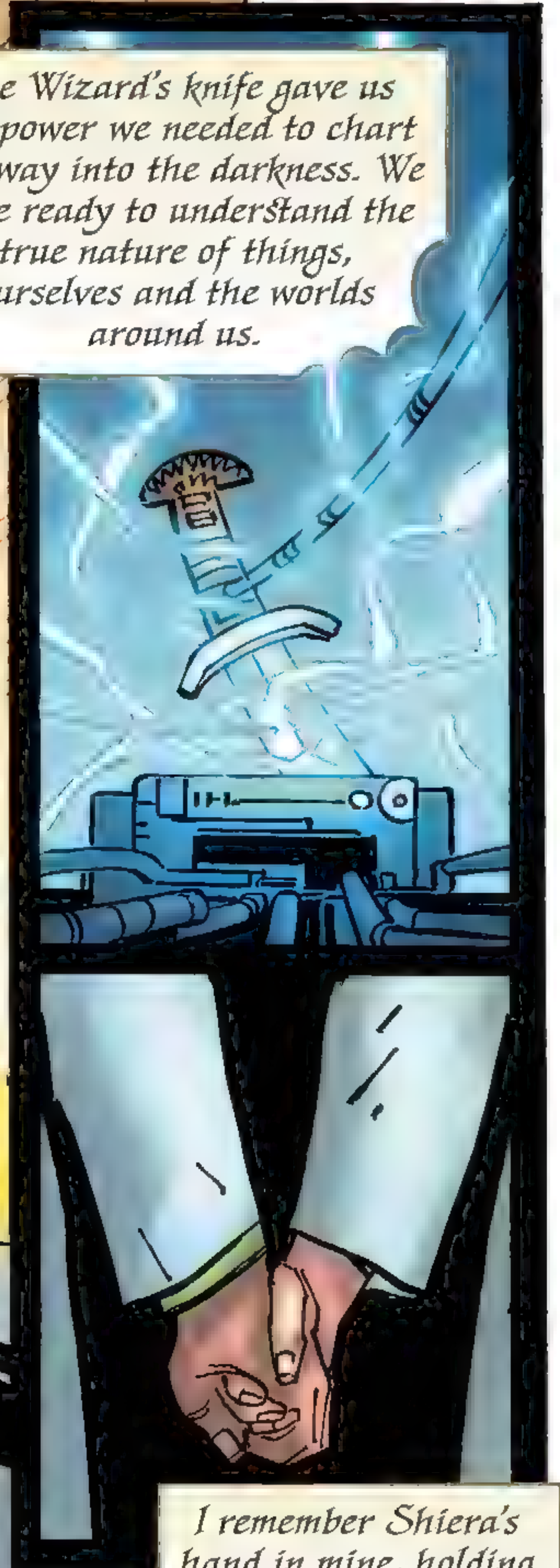


We wouldn't allow ourselves to be beaten down by the unknown.



We would challenge it.

The Wizard's knife gave us the power we needed to chart our way into the darkness. We were ready to understand the true nature of things, ourselves and the worlds around us.

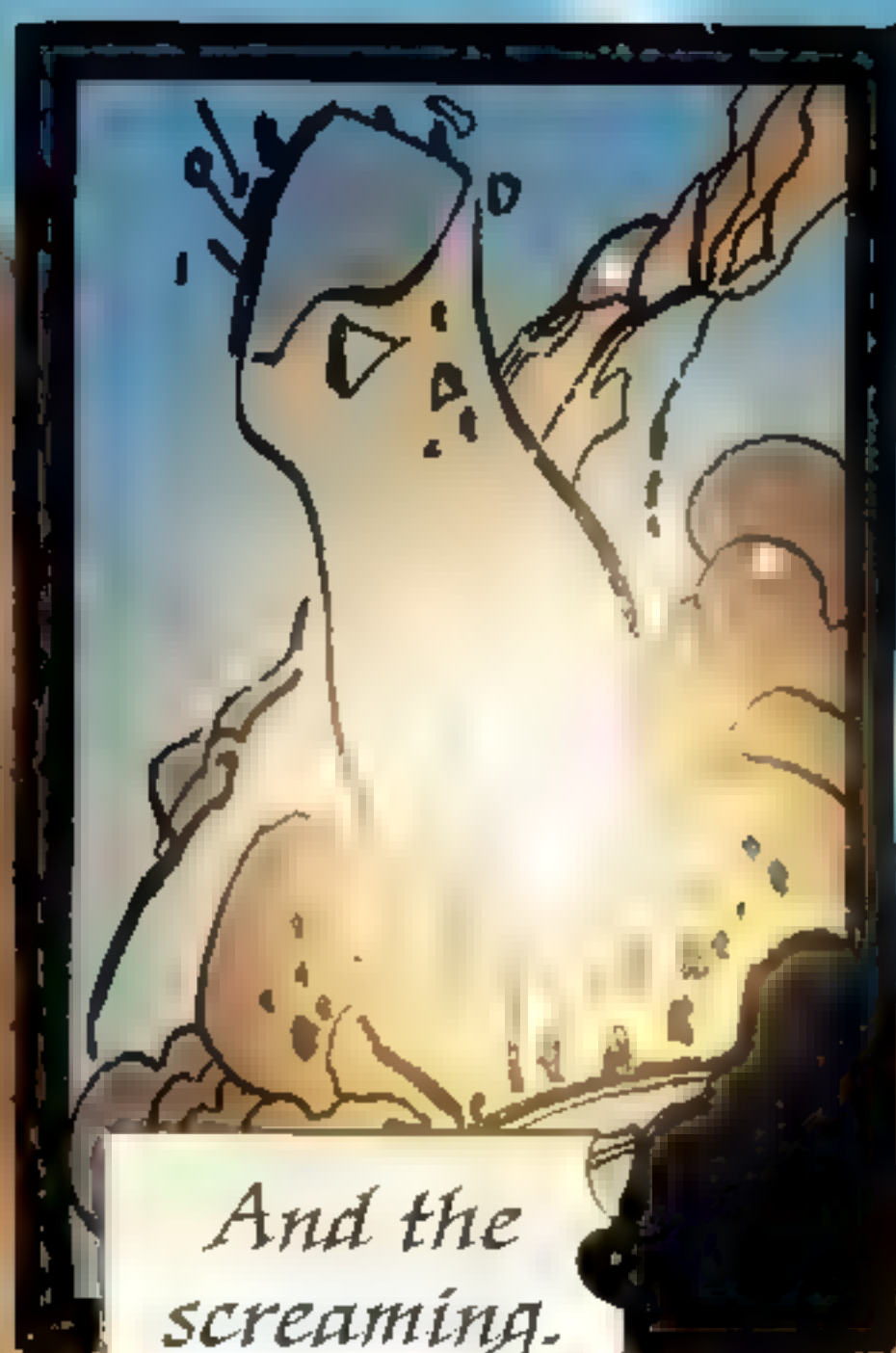


I remember Shiera's hand in mine, holding tight as the switch was flipped.

Then I remember
the Earth shaking,
as if it had been
torn apart.



And the
screaming.



As I stared into the darkness
where Challengers Mountain
had stood, I felt a chill
down my spine...

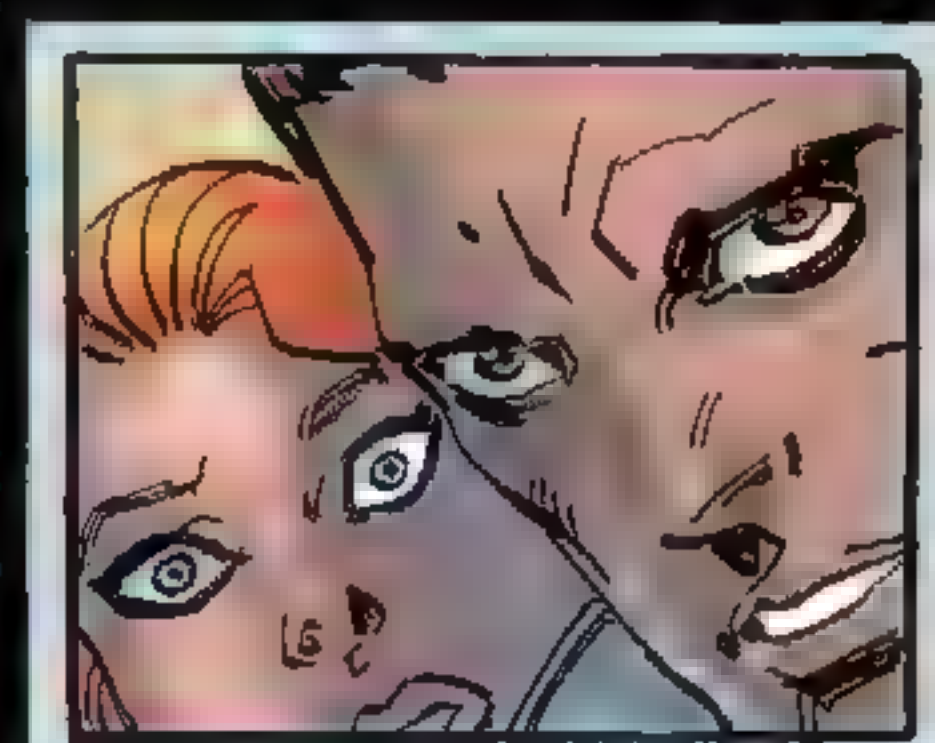
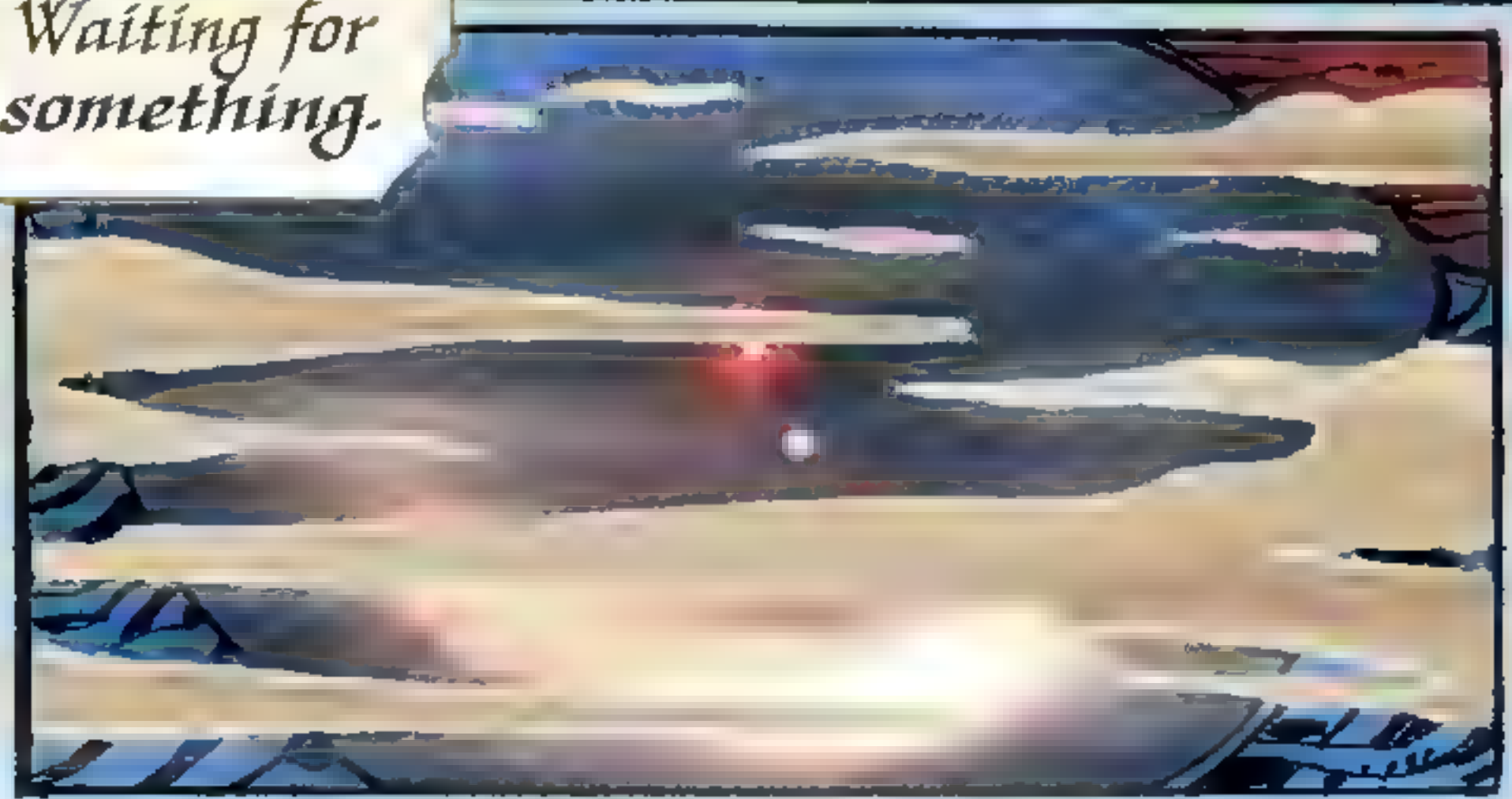


And I saw the eyes of
something great and terrible
staring back at me through
the abyss...

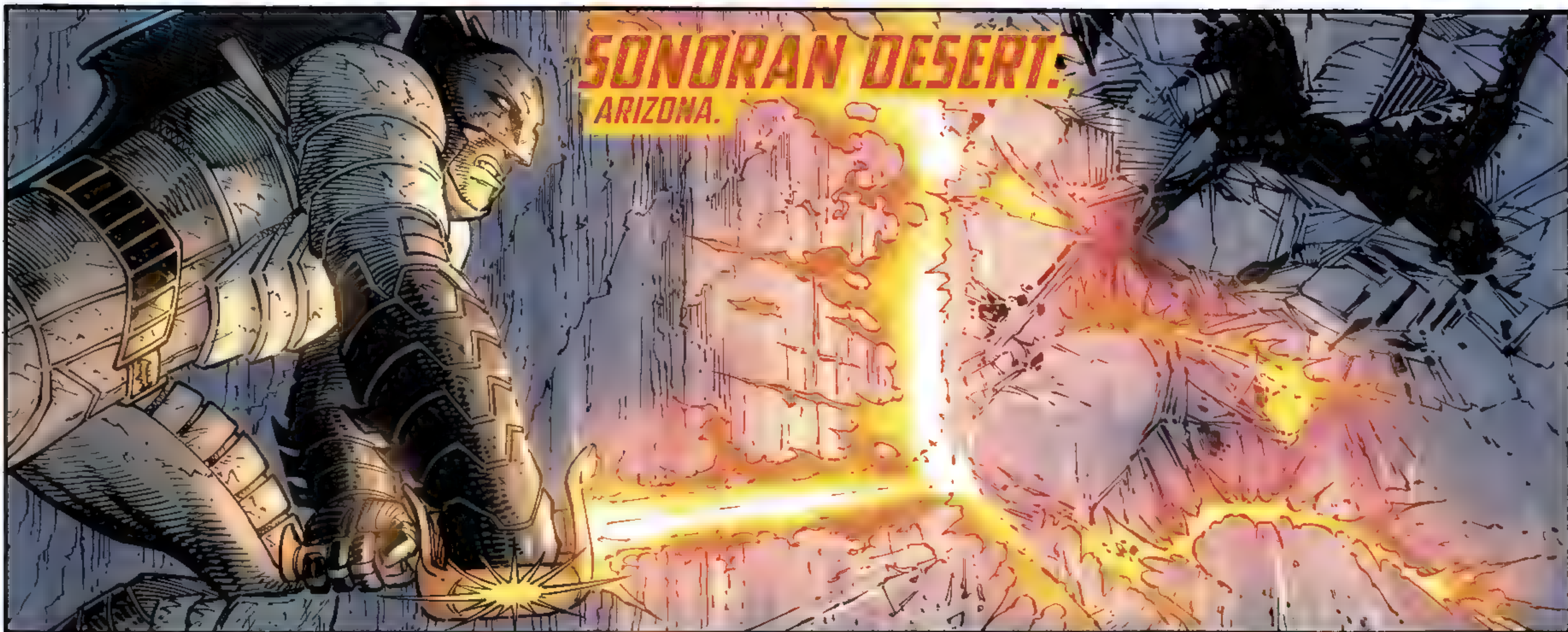


Eyes. Waiting in
the dark.

Waiting for
something.



Someone.



COMPUTER.
ACCESS THE SHADOW
DRIVE. RECORD NEW
AUDIO FILE.

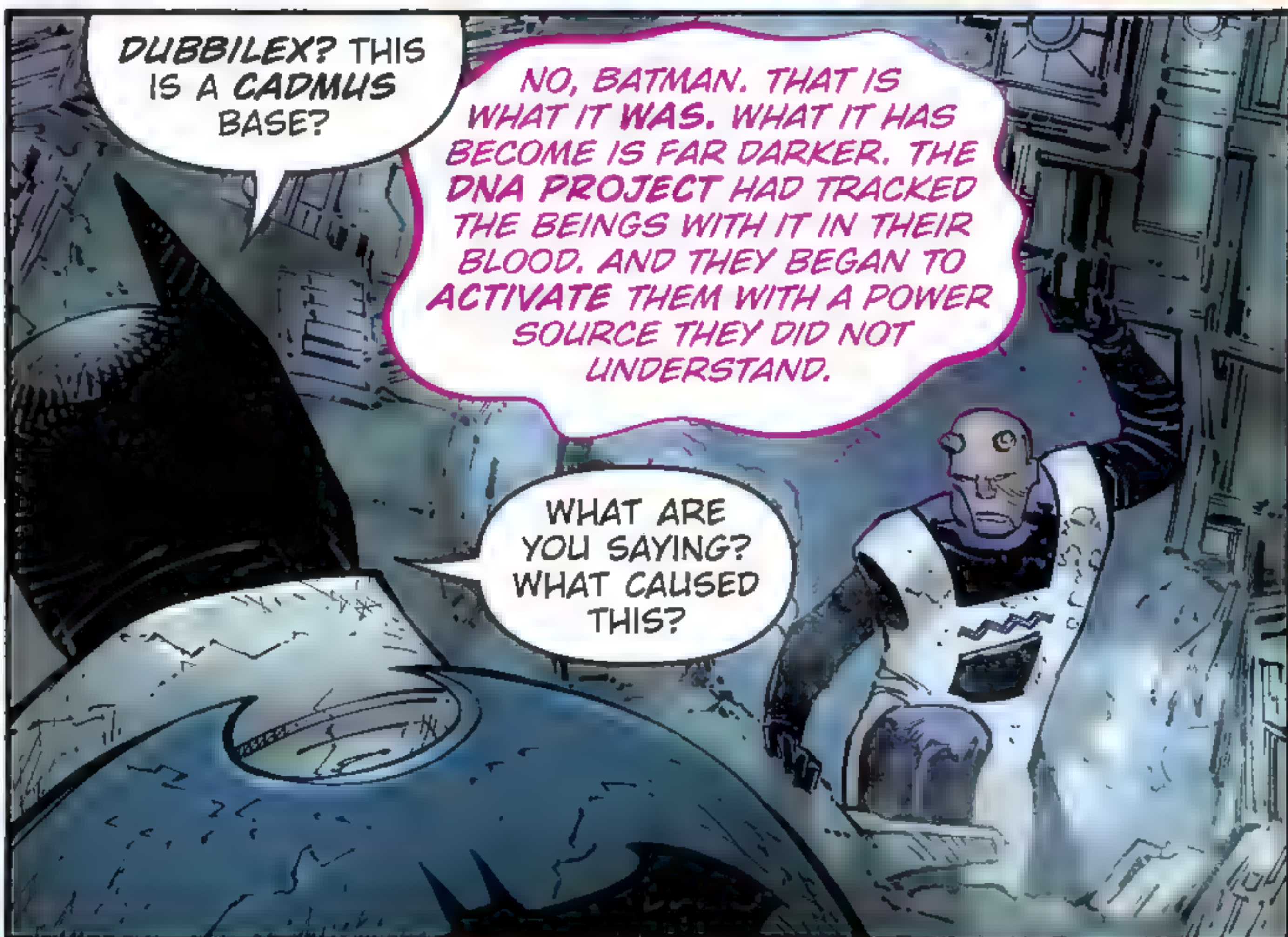
I FEEL LIKE
I'M RUNNING OUT
OF TIME.

SIXTY MILES
FROM THE COAST OF
GREECE, THE SUNBLADE
BEGAN TO VIBRATE IN
REACTION TO AN UNKNOWN
SOURCE THAT HAS LED ME
HERE. TO A SECRET BASE OF
UNKNOWN ORIGIN DEEP
UNDER THE SONORAN
DESERT.

SEARCHING FOR
ANSWERS, AND ALL I FIND
ARE MORE MYSTERIES. SEND AN
ALERT TO **BLACK LIGHTNING**.
I'LL NEED **THE OUTSIDERS** TO
SCOUR THE SURROUNDINGS
AND--

BATMAN.

**YOU
MUST TURN
BACK.**



DUBBILEX? THIS
IS A **CADMUS**
BASE?

**NO, BATMAN. THAT IS
WHAT IT WAS. WHAT IT HAS
BECOME IS FAR DARKER. THE
DNA PROJECT HAD TRACKED
THE BEINGS WITH IT IN THEIR
BLOOD. AND THEY BEGAN TO
ACTIVATE THEM WITH A POWER
SOURCE THEY DID NOT
UNDERSTAND.**

WHAT ARE
YOU SAYING?
WHAT CAUSED
THIS?



**THE METAL
YOU SEEK IS
CURSED, BATMAN.
THE ENERGY IN IT
IS ROILING AND
DARK. EVERYTHING
IT TOUCHES, IT
CORRUPTS.**

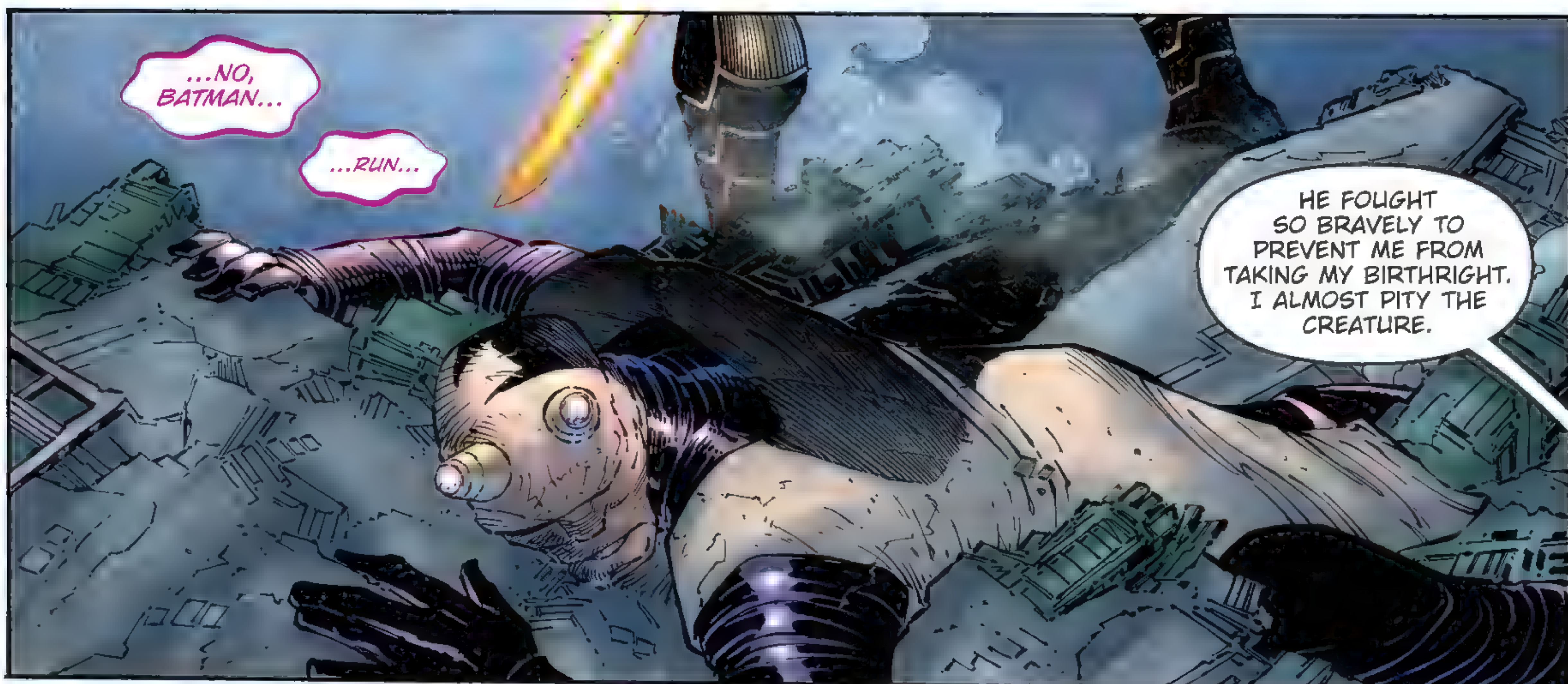
**SEE FOR
YOURSELF.
SEE THE
DAMAGE IT
HAS
WROUGHT.**



**TOO...WEAK...
CANNOT HOLD
THE PSYCHIC
PROJECTION...**

**YOU MUST
TURN BACK NOW.
BEFORE IT CORRUPTS
YOU, TOO...I FEEL ITS
GRIP TIGHTENING
ON YOU.**

**YOU NEED
TO TELL ME WHERE
THIS METAL IS...I NEED
IT TO SEE WHAT'S
COMING!**



...NO,
BATMAN...

...RUN...

HE FOUGHT
SO BRAVELY TO
PREVENT ME FROM
TAKING MY BIRTHRIGHT.
I ALMOST PITY THE
CREATURE.



HELLO, BELOVED.

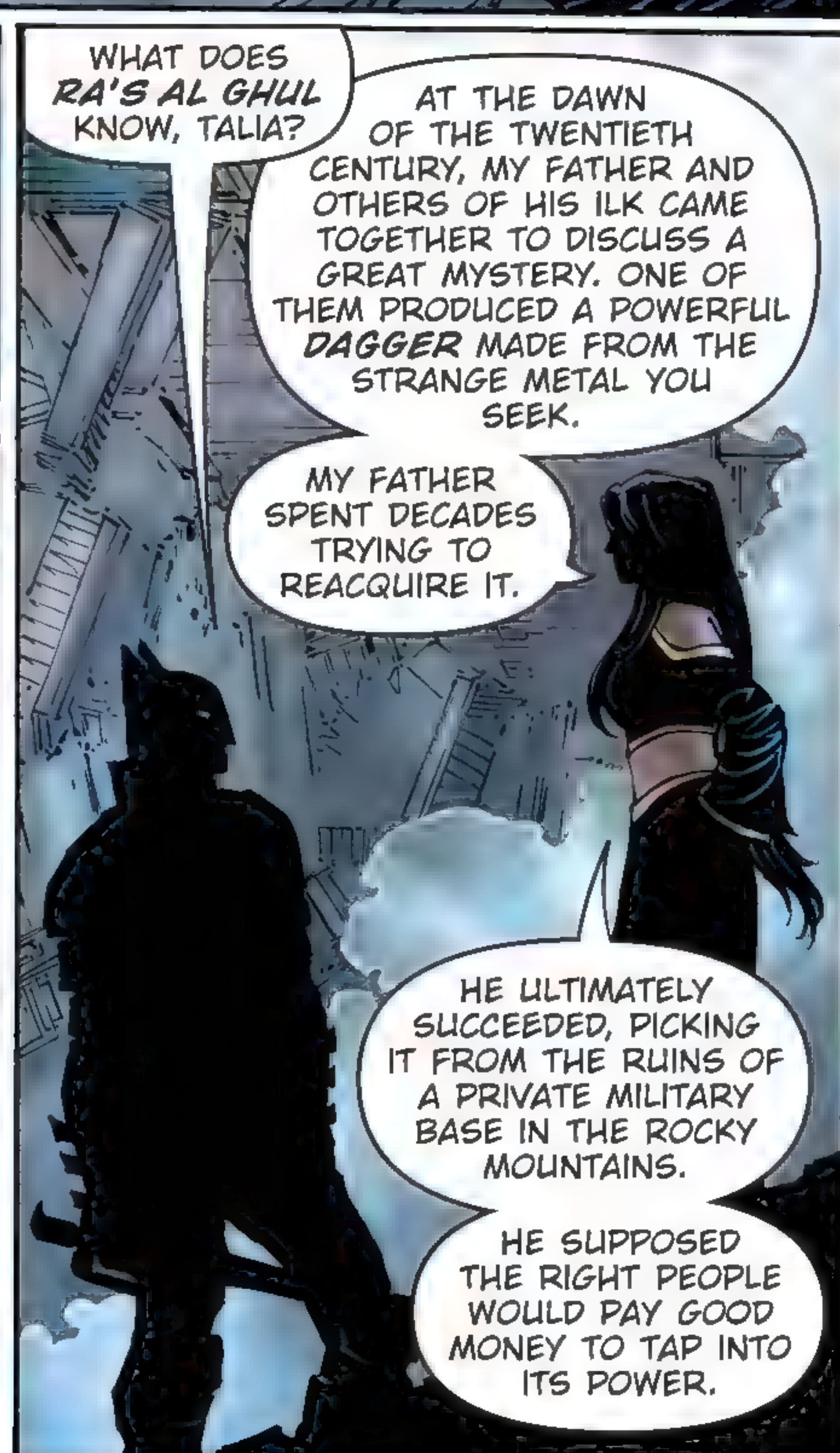
IT'S BEEN A
LONG TIME SINCE
"BELOVED."

WHAT ARE
YOU DOING HERE,
TALIA?



THE SAME THING AS
YOU, I SUPPOSE. YOU
SEEK SOMETHING OF
GREAT POWER, AND
IT ELUDES YOUR
GRASP.

BUT
NOTHING
ELUDES THE
GRASP OF
THE DEMON,
BRUCE.



WHAT DOES
RA'S AL GHUL
KNOW, TALIA?

AT THE DAWN
OF THE TWENTIETH
CENTURY, MY FATHER AND
OTHERS OF HIS ILK CAME
TOGETHER TO DISCUSS A
GREAT MYSTERY. ONE OF
THEM PRODUCED A POWERFUL
DAGGER MADE FROM THE
STRANGE METAL YOU
SEEK.

MY FATHER
SPENT DECADES
TRYING TO
REACQUIRE IT.

HE ULTIMATELY
SUCCEEDED, PICKING
IT FROM THE RUINS OF
A PRIVATE MILITARY
BASE IN THE ROCKY
MOUNTAINS.

HE SUPPOSED
THE RIGHT PEOPLE
WOULD PAY GOOD
MONEY TO TAP INTO
ITS POWER.



SO, YOU'VE
COME TO DO
YOUR FATHER'S
BIDDING.

NO, BATMAN. THERE
HAVE BEEN SECRET
BATTLES TO SUPPRESS
THE POWER OF THIS
METAL FOR DECADES.
BUT ITS POWER HAS
ONLY GROWN WITH
TIME, TAINING MORE
AND MORE. **TRUE
WAR** IS NOW
INEVITABLE

YOU MUST
KNOW THIS. YOU
HAVE ONE OF
THE POTENTIALS
LIVING UNDER
YOUR ROOF.



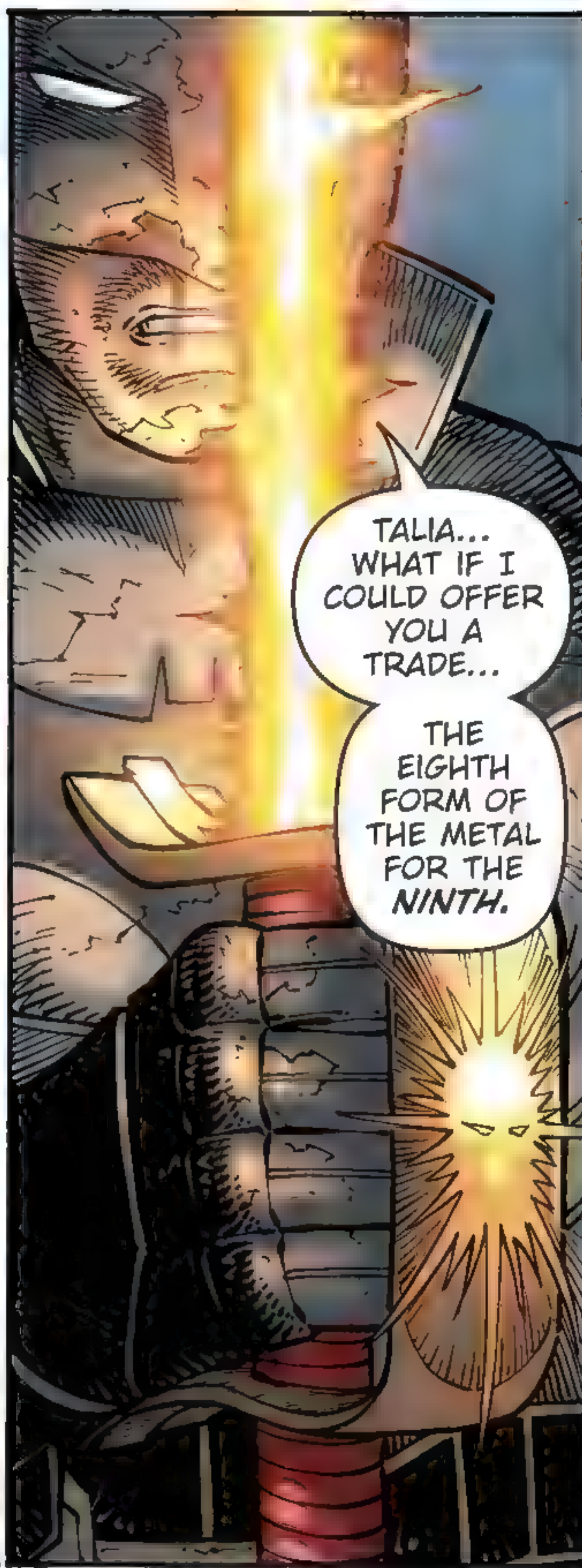
I CAME FOR
THE KNIFE TO
READY MYSELF
FOR WAR. IT
DARKENS DAY
BY DAY, ITS
TERRIBLE
POWER
GROWING.

I'VE HEARD
RUMBLINGS...
LEVIATHAN MOVING
AGAINST YOU...THE
GREAT **ASSASSIN**
YOU'VE BROUGHT
BACK INTO THE
FOLD...



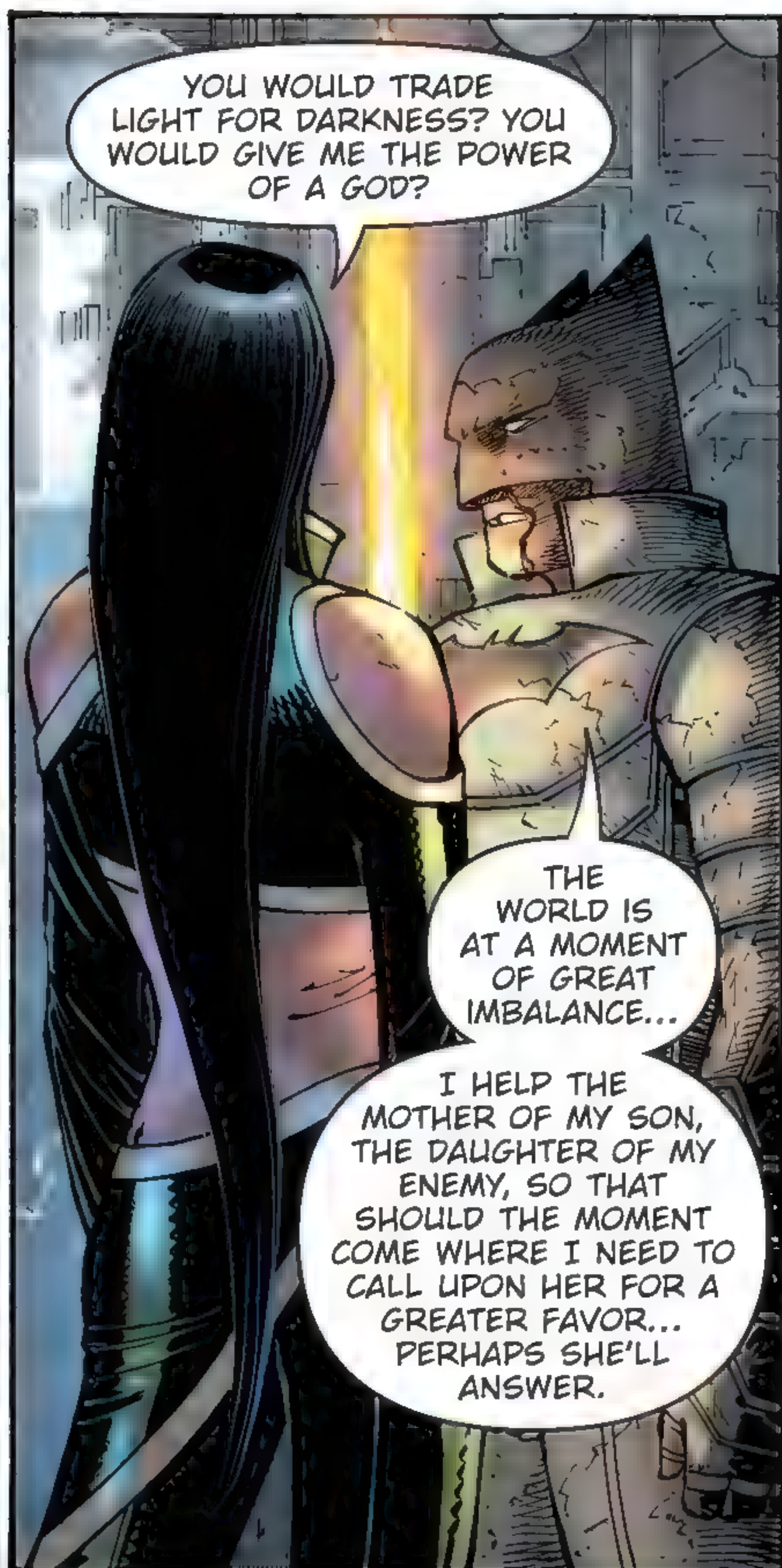
YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM THE **SILENCER**, BRUCE.

NOR FROM ME.



TALIA... WHAT IF I COULD OFFER YOU A TRADE...

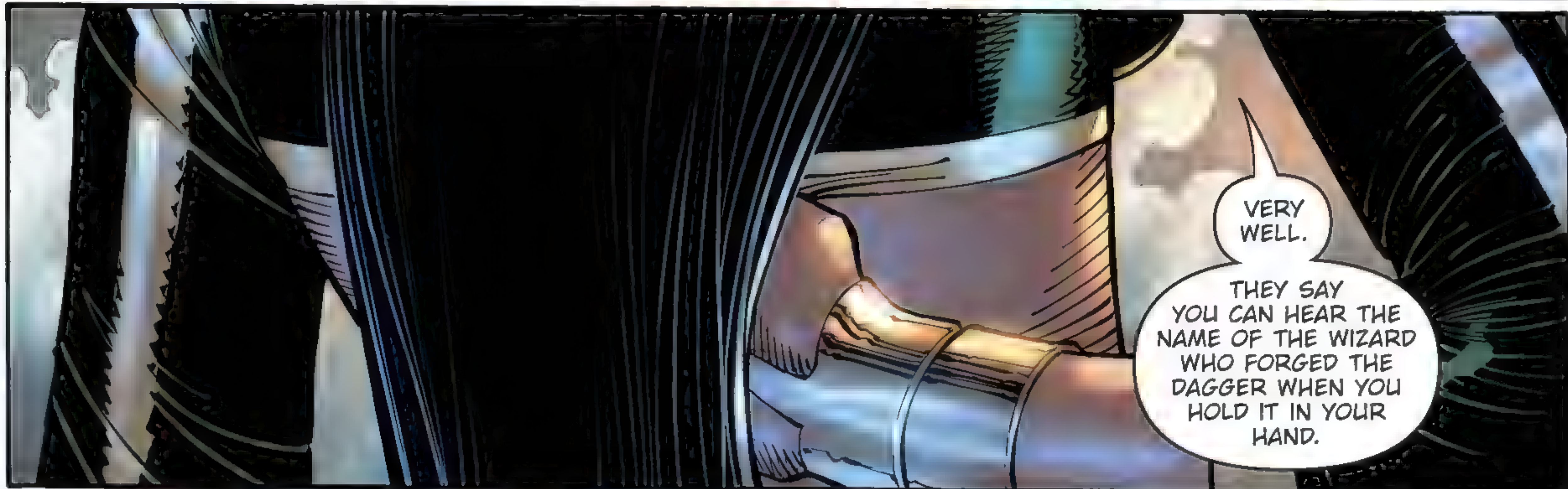
THE EIGHTH FORM OF THE METAL FOR THE NINTH.



YOU WOULD TRADE LIGHT FOR DARKNESS? YOU WOULD GIVE ME THE POWER OF A GOD?

THE WORLD IS AT A MOMENT OF GREAT IMBALANCE...

I HELP THE MOTHER OF MY SON, THE DAUGHTER OF MY ENEMY, SO THAT SHOULD THE MOMENT COME WHERE I NEED TO CALL UPON HER FOR A GREATER FAVOR... PERHAPS SHE'LL ANSWER.



VERY WELL.

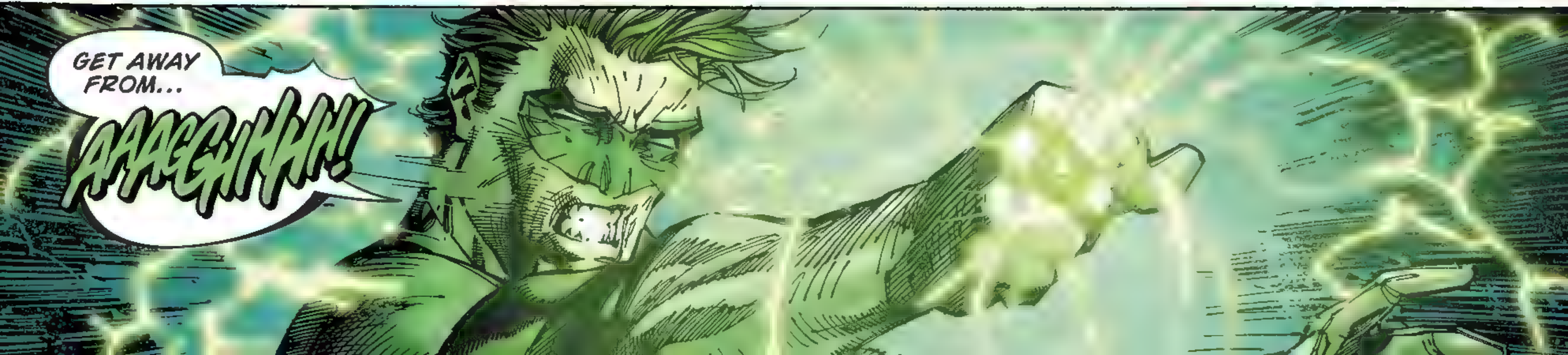
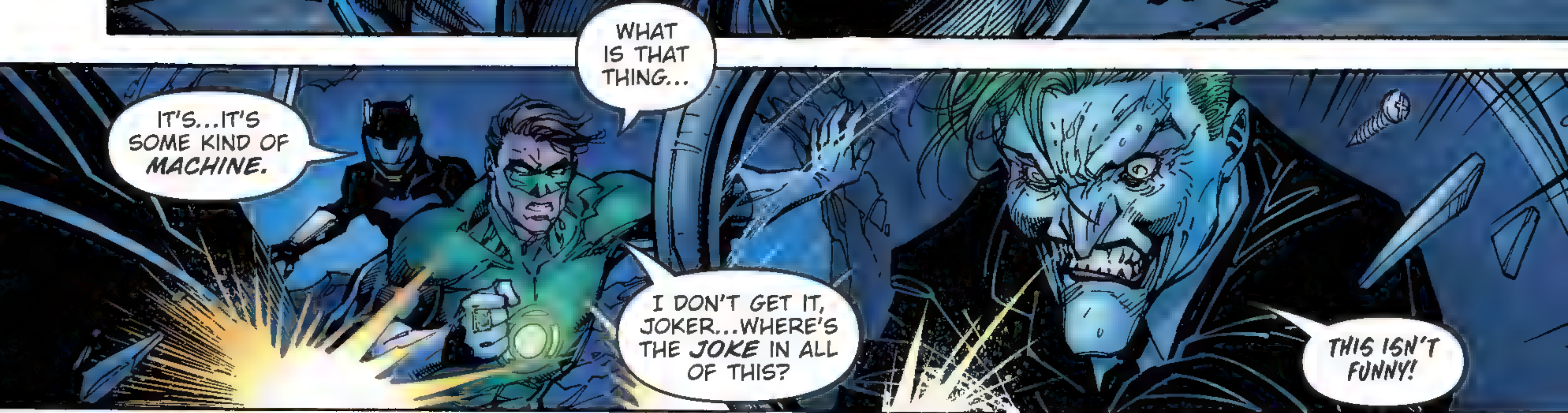
THEY SAY YOU CAN HEAR THE NAME OF THE WIZARD WHO FORGED THE DAGGER WHEN YOU HOLD IT IN YOUR HAND.



THAT IT CARRIES A SMALL PIECE OF HIS GREAT POWER.



THE POWER OF SHAZAM!





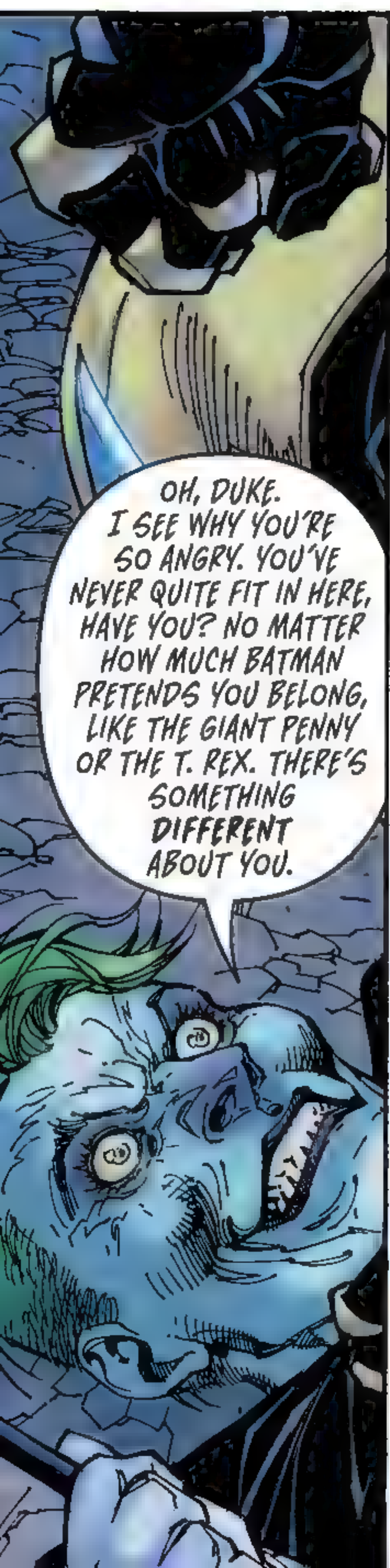
DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?!

THIS IS WHAT YOUR ALIEN BOSSES SENT YOU HERE TO STOP. IF HE USES THE MACHINE, THAT'LL BE THE END OF EVERYTHING!



NO!

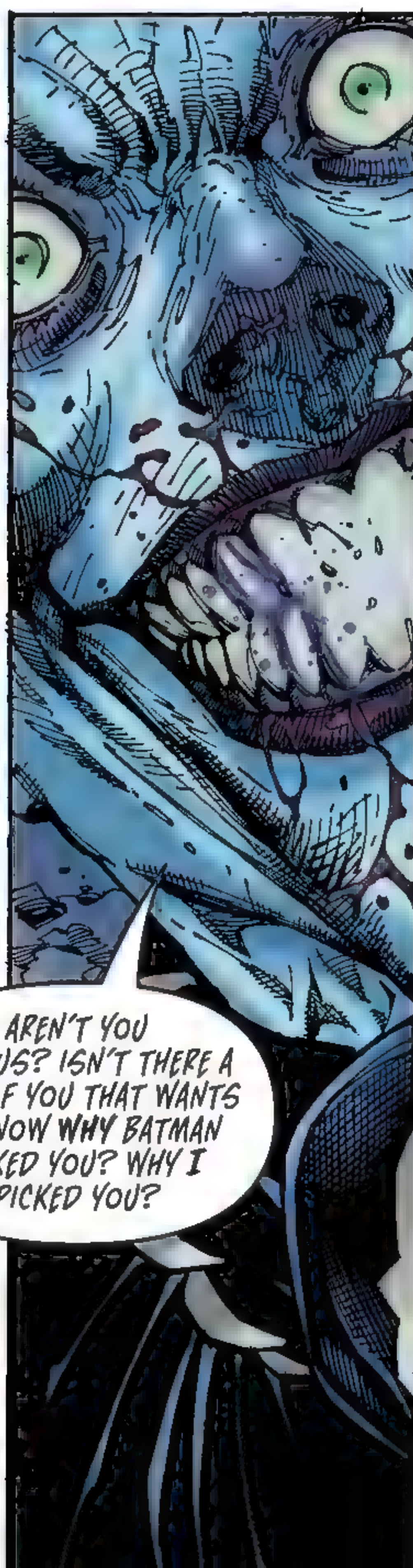
UNNF!



OH, DUKE. I SEE WHY YOU'RE SO ANGRY. YOU'VE NEVER QUITE FIT IN HERE, HAVE YOU? NO MATTER HOW MUCH BATMAN PRETENDS YOU BELONG, LIKE THE GIANT PENNY OR THE T. REX. THERE'S SOMETHING DIFFERENT ABOUT YOU.



SHUT UP!

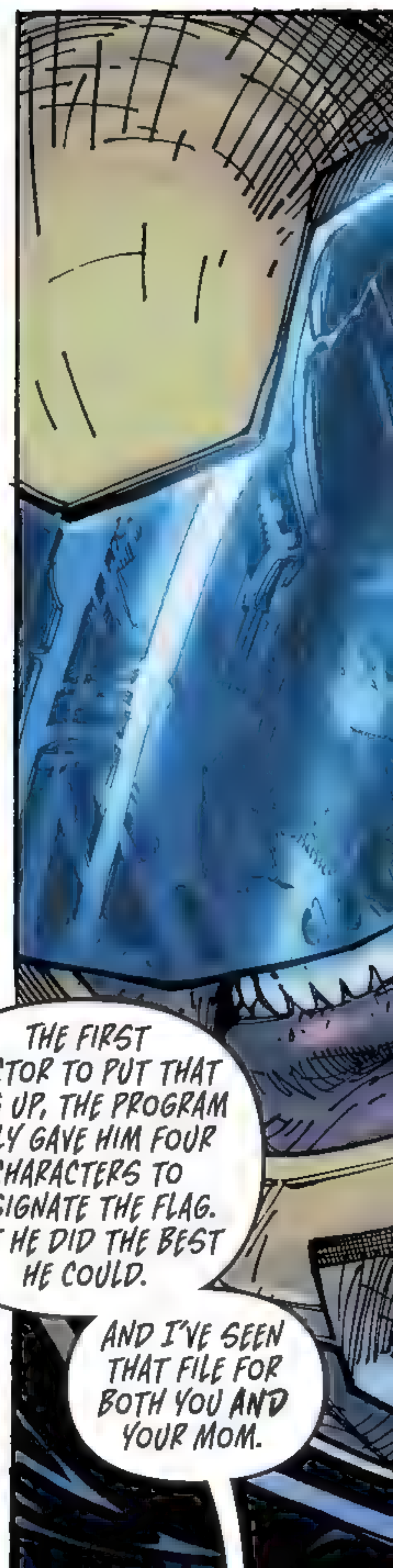


AREN'T YOU CURIOUS? ISN'T THERE A PART OF YOU THAT WANTS TO KNOW WHY BATMAN PICKED YOU? WHY I PICKED YOU?



DID YOU KNOW, AT GOTHAM MERCY HOSPITAL, THERE'S AN AUTOMATIC FLAG THAT GOES UP WHEN SOMETHING UNUSUAL IS DETECTED IN A BLOOD SAMPLE...

IT'S A KIND OF METAL TOXICITY, BUT THEY CAN'T REALLY TRACK ANY OF THE EFFECTS. BECAUSE IT SURE AS HELL ISN'T IRON. IT'S NOT EVEN MERCURY...



THE FIRST DOCTOR TO PUT THAT FLAG UP, THE PROGRAM ONLY GAVE HIM FOUR CHARACTERS TO DESIGNATE THE FLAG. BUT HE DID THE BEST HE COULD.

AND I'VE SEEN THAT FILE FOR BOTH YOU AND YOUR MOM.



M-E-T-A.



AND BATMAN'S BEEN TRACKING AS MANY OF YOU AS HE CAN FOR YEARS NOW. DON'T YOU SEE?

A WHOLE NEW GENERATION OF SUPERHEROES AND SUPER-VILLAINS! THE SOLDIERS OF THE WAR THAT WILL RIP THIS WORLD APART!



TELL THE COMPUTER TO PULL UP THE META-FILE SOMETIME. YOU CAN SEE THEM ALL FOR YOURSELF!

PEOPLE WITH THAT CRAZY METAL RUNNING THROUGH THEIR VEINS...YOU'VE SEEN WHAT IT CAN DO IN ITS OTHER FORMS...

CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT IT DOES TO PEOPLE? WHAT AM I SAYING? OF COURSE YOU CAN.

I KNOW THE TRUTH, DUKE. I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE HERE TO DO. YOU'LL LET HIM SEE IN THE DARK.

THAT'S ALL YOU ARE, DUKE. THAT'S THE ROLE YOU'RE DESTINED TO PLAY.

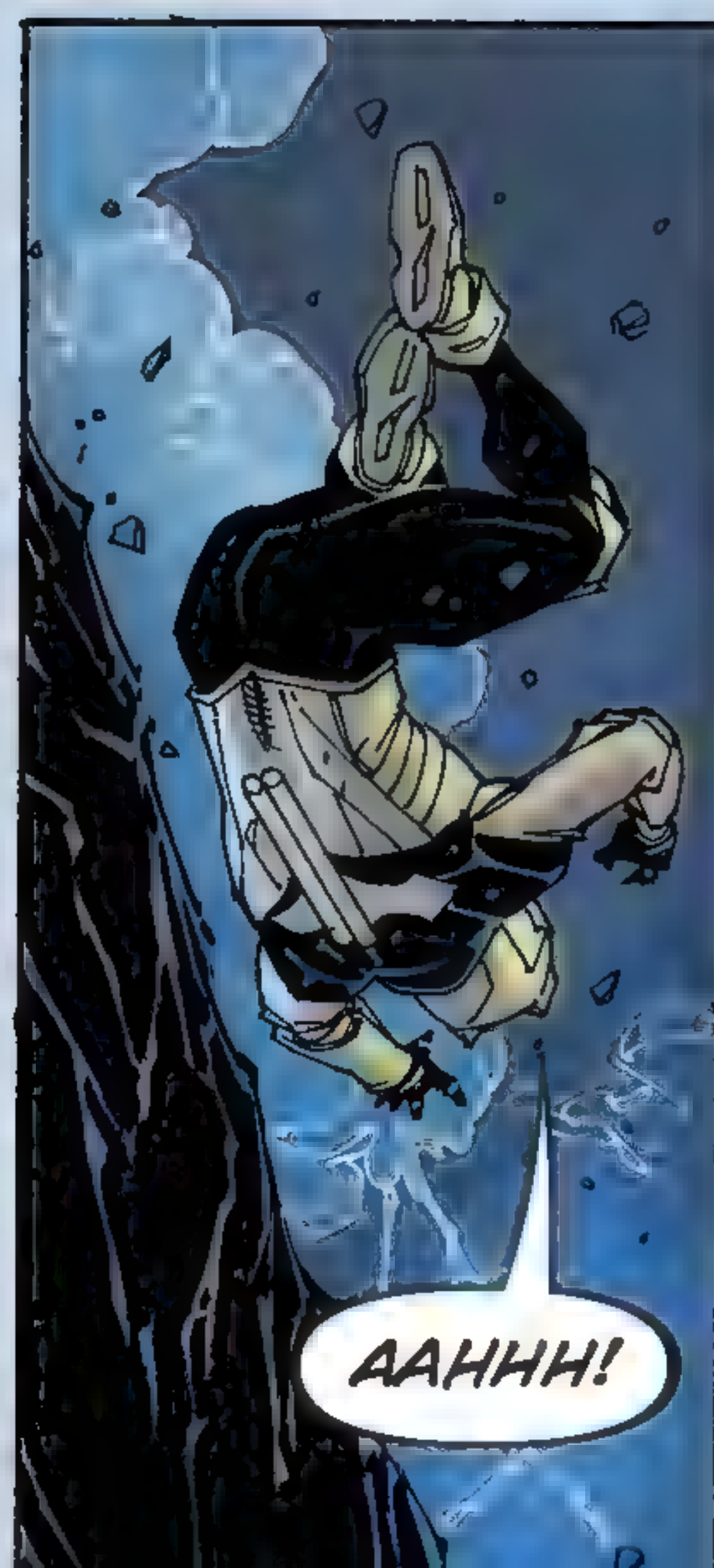


YOU ARE THE SIGNAL.

AND I CAN'T ALLOW THAT. SO I'M GOING TO HAVE TO KILL YOU, NOW.



NO...I WON'T LET YOU...



AAHHH!



AND THE SIGNAL GOES DARK.

HAHAHAHAHAHAHA...



AND NOW, TO WRITE THE GRAND FINALE OF THIS SORDID TALE. SO WE CAN GET BACK TO THE GOOD STUFF.

BATS AND CLOWNS. NOT BATS AND BIRDS. THIS HAS GONE ON LONG ENOUGH.

YOU'RE DAMN RIGHT, JOKER.



HM?

RMMMBL!



THERE'S SOMETHING YOU PROBABLY SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BEFORE YOU KNOCKED ME INTO BATS' UNDERGROUND HANGAR.

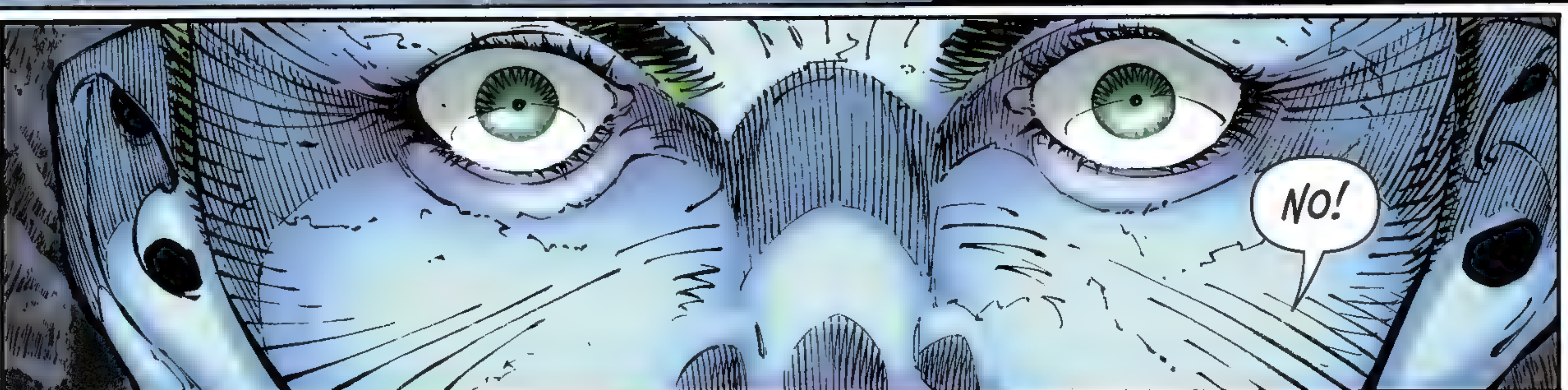
RRR!

BL!



I'M A DECORATED MEMBER OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE.

YOUR STORY TIME IS OVER.

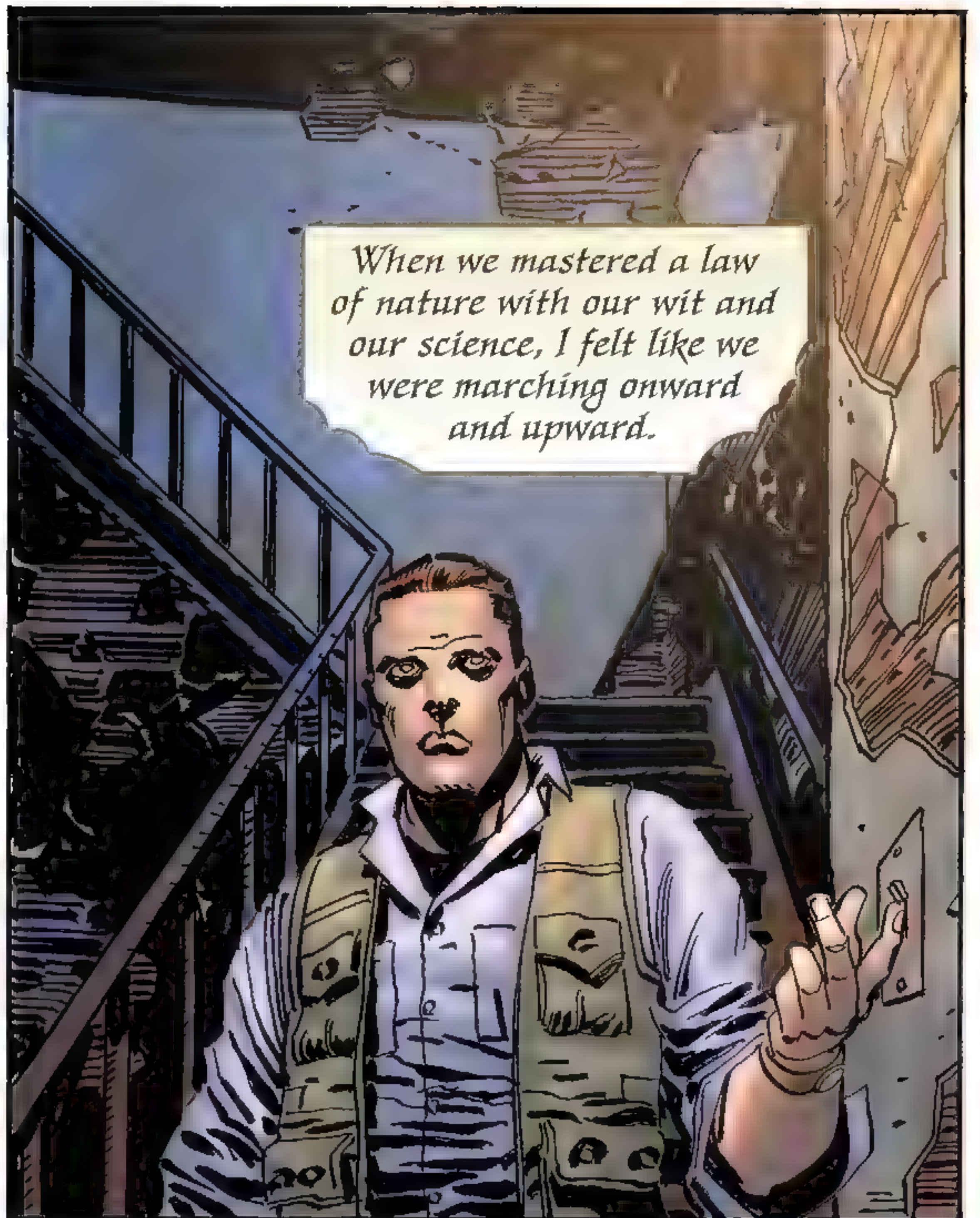


NO!

There was a time I believed that the world got a little better every time we solved one of the great mysteries.

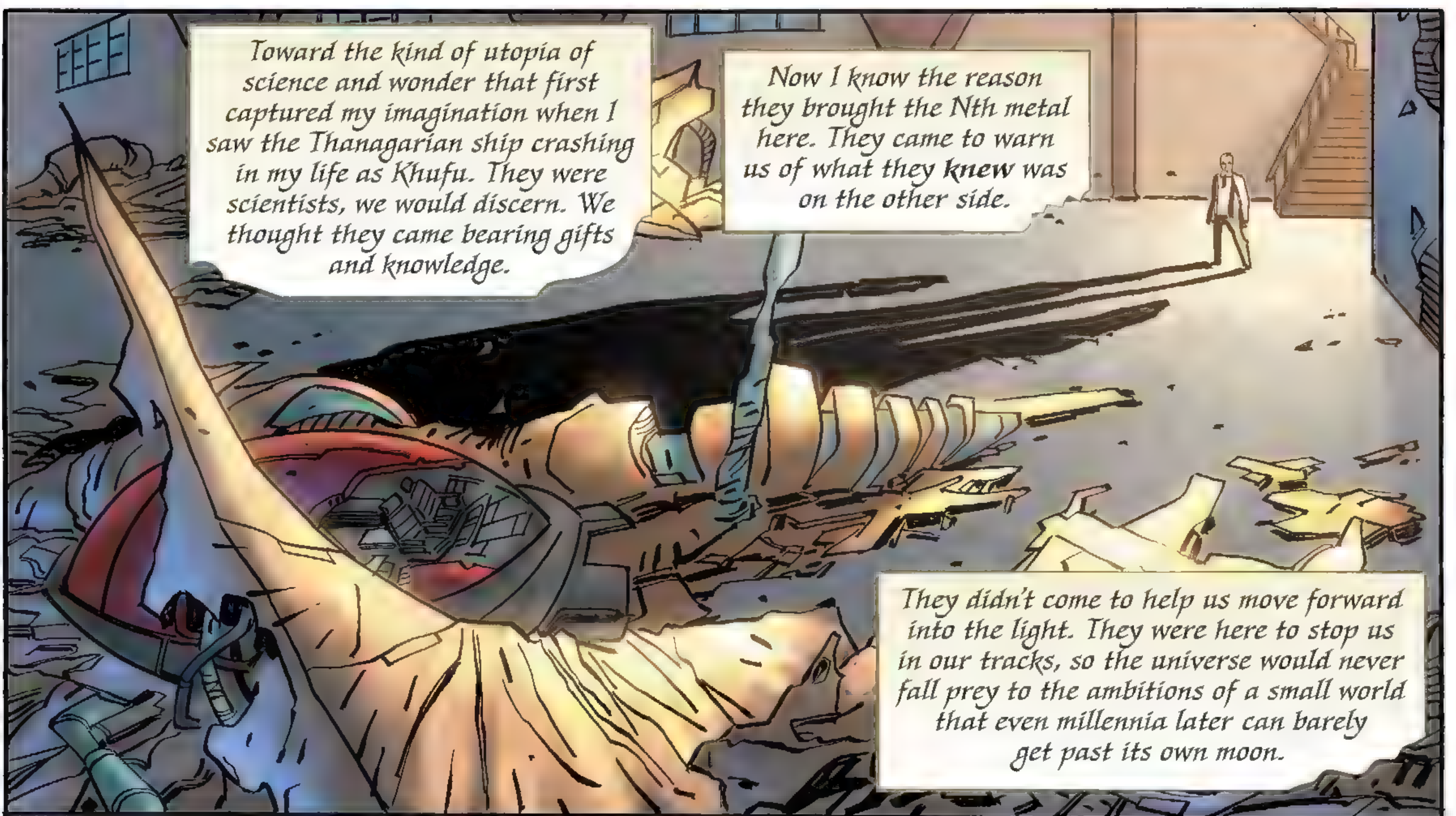


When we mastered a law of nature with our wit and our science, I felt like we were marching onward and upward.



Toward the kind of utopia of science and wonder that first captured my imagination when I saw the Thanagarian ship crashing in my life as Khufu. They were scientists, we would discern. We thought they came bearing gifts and knowledge.

Now I know the reason they brought the Nth metal here. They came to warn us of what they knew was on the other side.



They didn't come to help us move forward into the light. They were here to stop us in our tracks, so the universe would never fall prey to the ambitions of a small world that even millennia later can barely get past its own moon.

This is the final entry in my journal. I believe I have found a way to penetrate the barrier of our reality and enter the dark myself.

I still believe, in my heart, that there is wonder and hope out there in the unknown, at the center of all this incredible power. But that hope seems more foolish with every passing day. I feel the encroaching darkness planting doubt deep in my soul.



The others, even my wife, believe that the mystery is and has always been a trap... A trap dragging us into nightmares, begging us to let those nightmares free and destroy our world.

And it is true. Our enemy has grown stronger than I ever could have imagined...they keep killing my spies, as I get closer to determining their plans.



I've done my best to avert their endgame...

I am entrusting this journal, and the terrible secrets with the family that has always been most loyal to the birds. With the command to hide it unless I fail and the beast comes again. Then and only then will the journal reveal itself.



They know how important this is. That they must stay far from the dark and frightening truth lurking under the world, trying to force itself through.



I stand with my torch, facing the dark. I believe I will find something out there. A glimmer of potential. But I know that I am likely wrong. That all I will find is the darkness itself.

I walk towards my end alone, so that no man could ever be foolish enough to follow.



HA! HAHAHAHAHAHHA...



WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

IT'S HAPPENING AGAIN! NO MATTER WHAT I DO, IT JUST KEEPS ON COMING! EVERYTHING IS GOING BACKWARDS, AND NEITHER OF YOU UNDERSTAND!

YOU DON'T EVEN REALIZE THAT THIS TIME I WAS BEING THE GOOD GUY!



A DARK CRISIS IS COMING, AND HERE YOU ARE, TWO BRIGHT BURNING LIGHTS CALLING IT FORWARD!

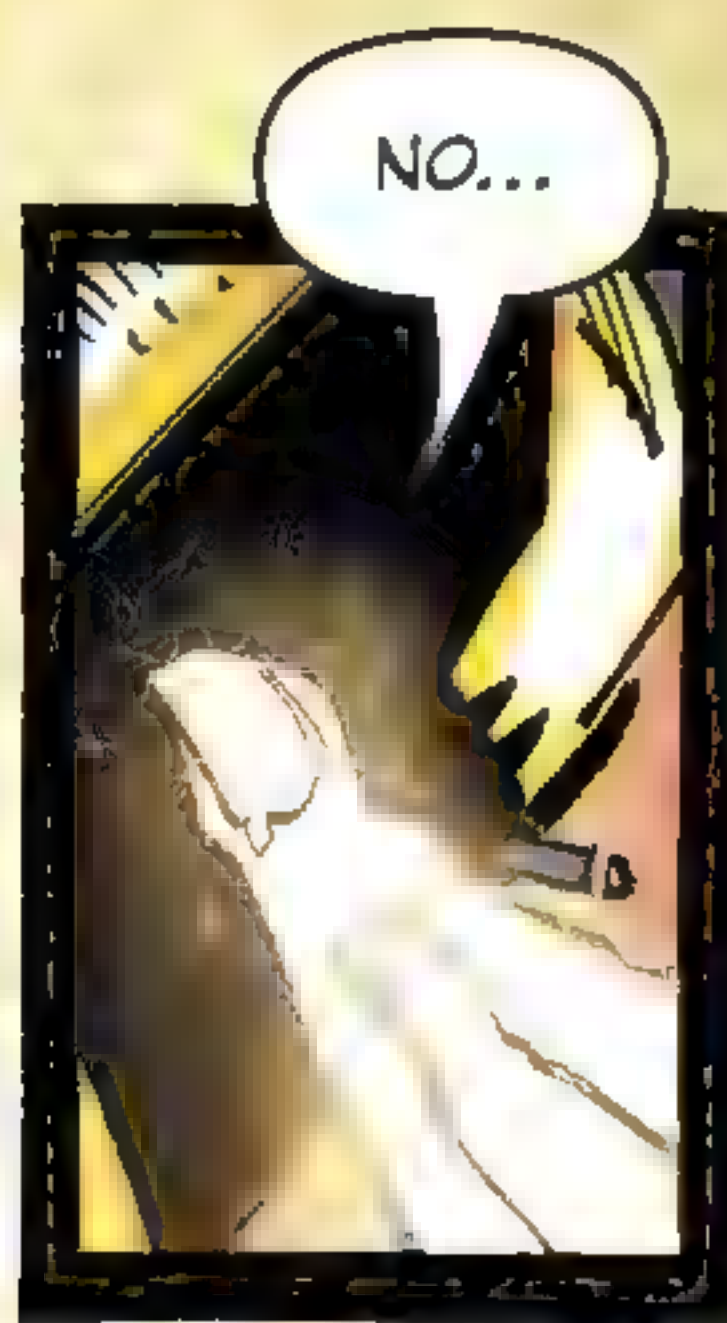
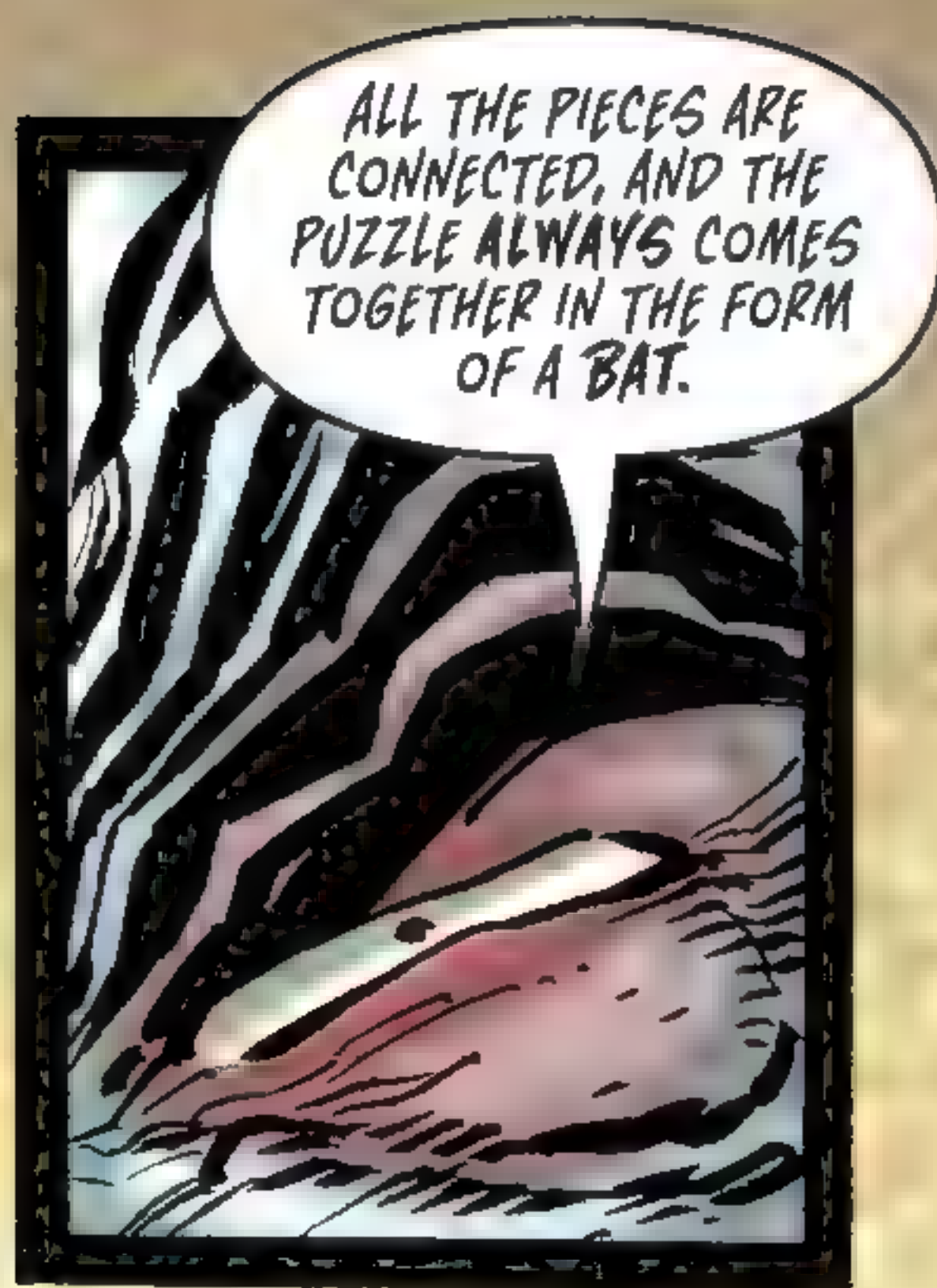


GL... SOMETHING'S WRONG...

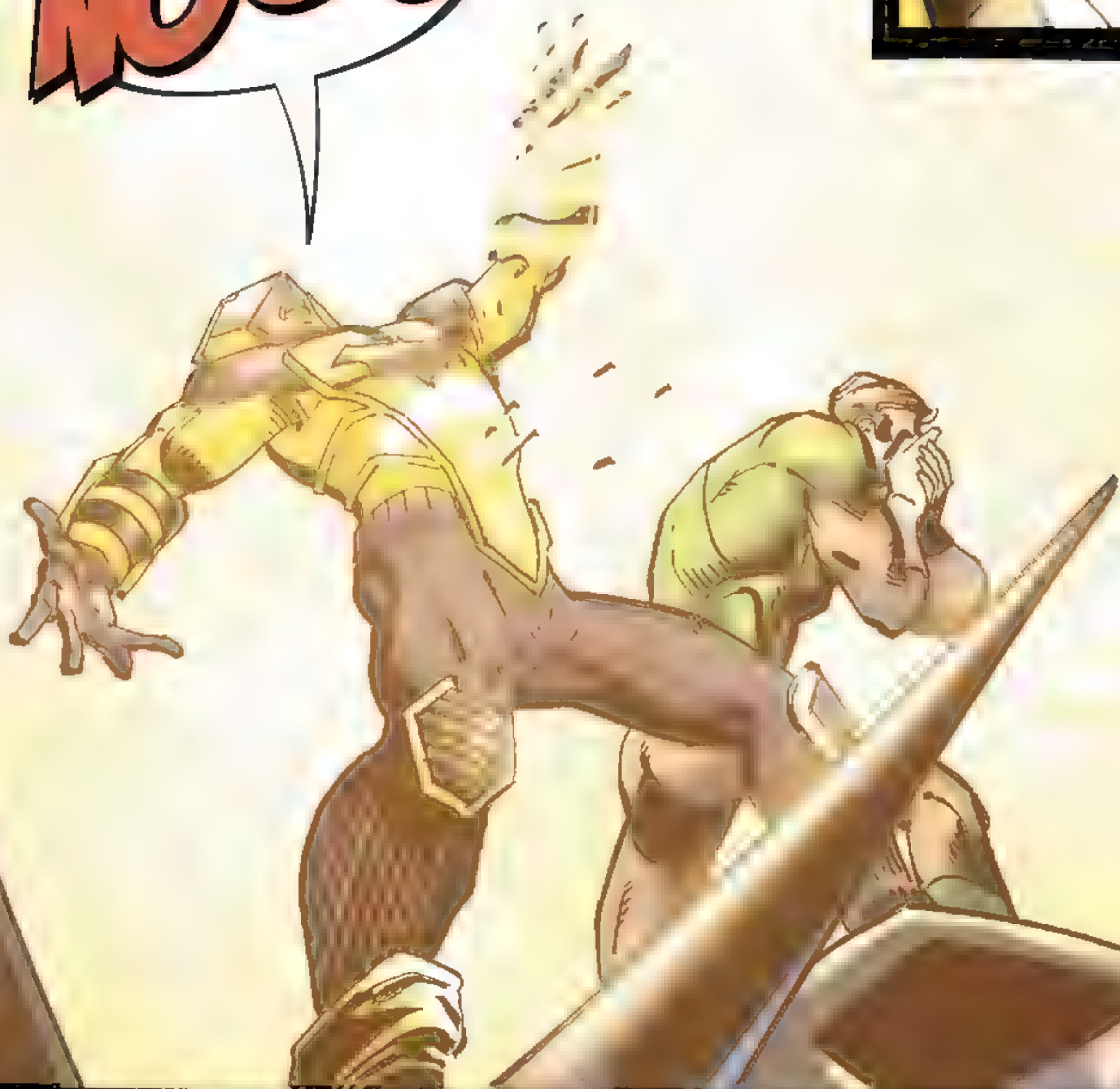


I MEAN, COME ON! HOW IS THAT NOT FUNNY!





NoOo!





WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO TO MY CAVE?



WHAT DID I DO?! THIS WAS **THE JOKER!**

YOU LET HIM OUT? DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA--

--HOW MANY JUSTICE LEAGUE BYLAWS YOU'RE BREAKING FOR LOCKING UP ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS PEOPLE ON THE PLANET IN YOUR **BASEMENT** WITHOUT TELLING ANYONE? YEAH, BRUCE, I DO.



I NEEDED HIM.

FOR **WHAT?** TO FILL EVERY GAP IN THIS INSANE CONSPIRACY THEORY WITH LIES? SECRET METALS WITH INCREDIBLE POWER SHAPING HUMAN HISTORY...I MEAN, COME ON!

AND BASED ON WHAT YOU TOLD THE LEAGUE. YOU CAN'T EVEN BE SURE **THAT** WAS THE **REAL JOKER!**



BRUCE. WE NEED YOU TO EXPLAIN WHAT'S GOING ON HERE.



...I'VE SPENT A LONG TIME PUTTING THESE PIECES TOGETHER. FINDING WHAT I NEEDED TO LOOK BACK INTO THE DARK.

BACK?

I CALLED THIS MY **FINAL INVENTION**. IT WAS DESIGNED TO HELP ENSURE THIS CITY WOULD ALWAYS HAVE A BATMAN. BUT BEFORE IT WAS FINISHED, I DIED AT THE HANDS OF THE JOKER...

...AND THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE END OF MY STORY, IF NOT FOR THE METAL. IF NOT FOR THE DIONESIUM, I WOULD HAVE LOST MY LIFE, NOT JUST MY MEMORY. ULTIMATELY, I USED THE MACHINE TO RECONSTITUTE MYSELF.



"BUT THE METAL WAS STILL NESTLED IN THE CRACKS IN MY SKULL. AND WHEN THE MACHINE ACTIVATED...I SAW SOMETHING **IMPOSSIBLE**."



"IMPOSSIBLE VERSIONS OF MYSELF, DYING OVER AND OVER AGAIN."

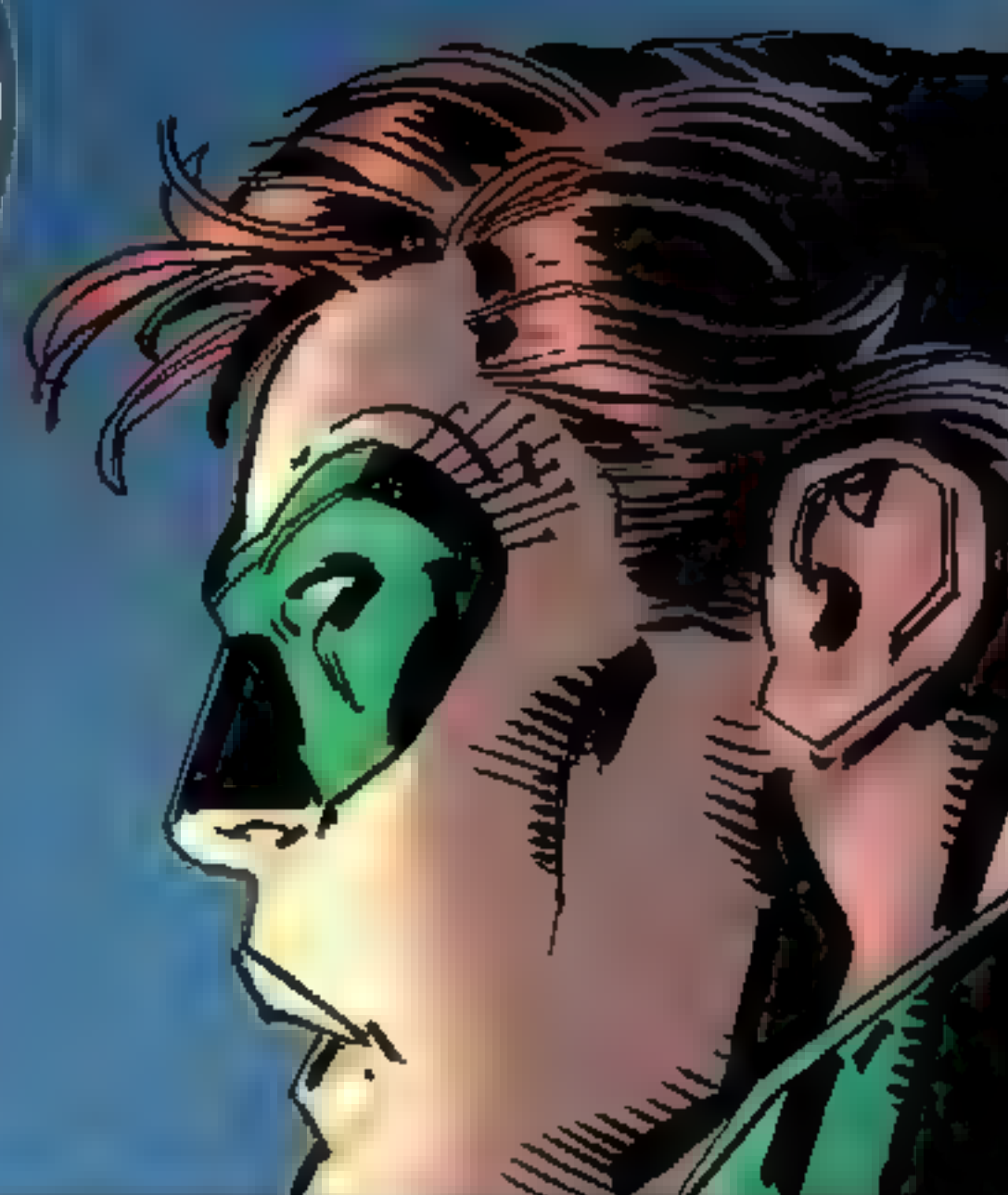
NOTHING IN THE MACHINE I BUILT COULD HAVE GIVEN ME THOSE VISIONS. IT WAS THE METAL. THIS INCREDIBLE, POWERFUL METAL.

THIS METAL I COULDN'T ESCAPE IN ANY FACET OF MY LIFE. AS THOUGH IT WERE TARGETING ME, OVER AND OVER FOR SOME UNKNOWN REASON. AS THOUGH IT WANTED ME TO UNDERSTAND IT.

I BEGAN TO REBUILD THE MACHINE FROM THE GROUND UP. I WANTED TO LOOK INSIDE THE DARK, TO THE SOURCE OF THE METAL'S POWER. I KNEW THAT ONCE I DID, IT WOULD ALL COME TOGETHER. IT WOULD ALL MAKE **SENSE**.



WHATEVER YOU'VE BEEN DOING IN HERE CAUGHT THE ATTENTION OF THE **GUARDIANS OF THE UNIVERSE**, BATMAN.



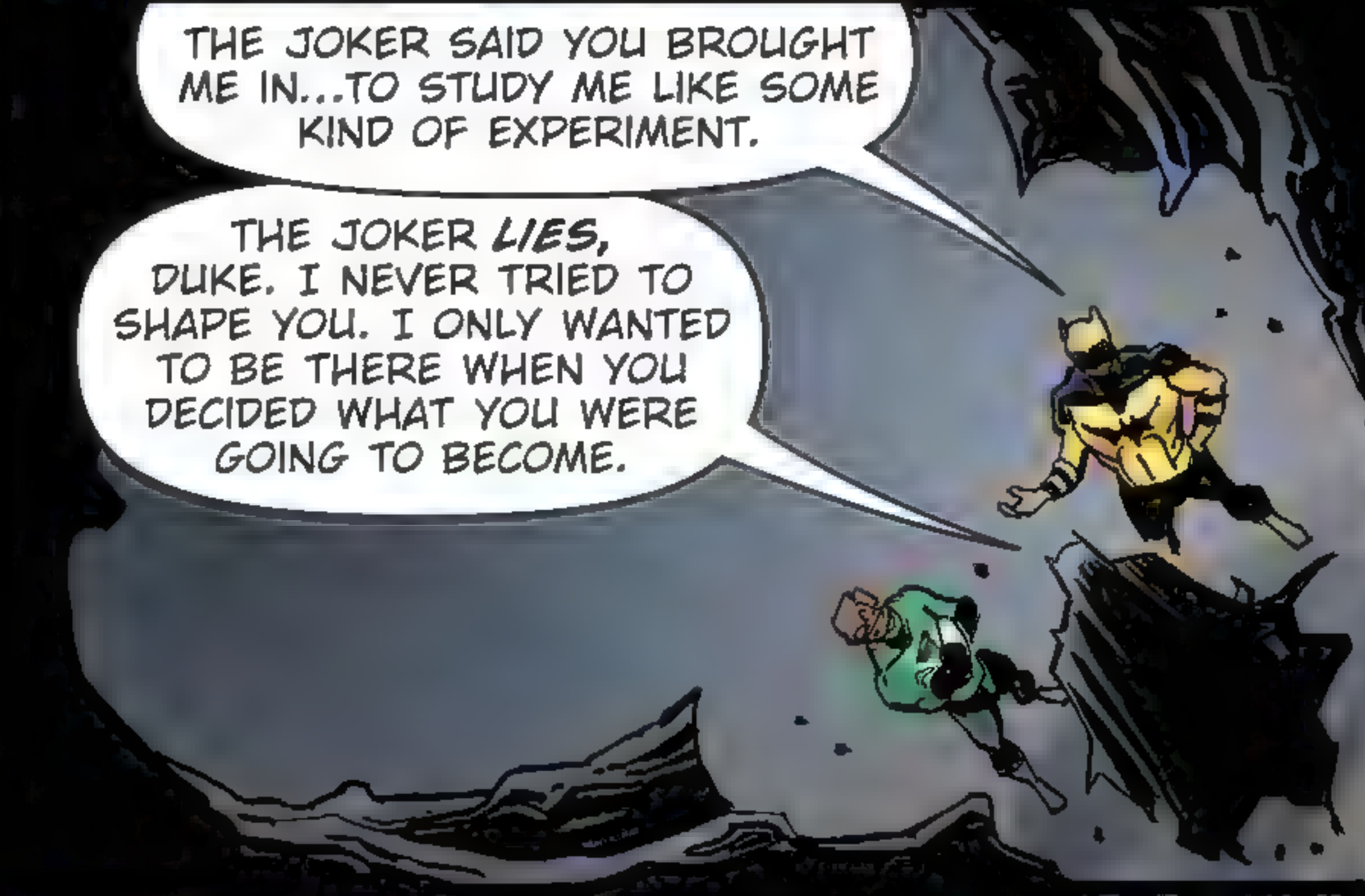
AND DOESN'T THAT GIVE YOU PAUSE? WHY WOULD A MORTAL MAN ON A BACKWATER WORLD DOING A LITTLE BIT OF ARCHAEOLOGY REQUIRE INTERFERENCE BY INTERGALACTIC PEACEKEEPERS?

WHY DOES YOUR RING, THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON IN THE UNIVERSE, COWER IN THE FACE OF A PURE STRAIN OF THIS STRANGE, IMPOSSIBLE METAL?



THE JOKER SAID YOU BROUGHT ME IN...TO STUDY ME LIKE SOME KIND OF EXPERIMENT.

THE JOKER **LIES**, DUKE. I NEVER TRIED TO SHAPE YOU. I ONLY WANTED TO BE THERE WHEN YOU DECIDED WHAT YOU WERE GOING TO BECOME.



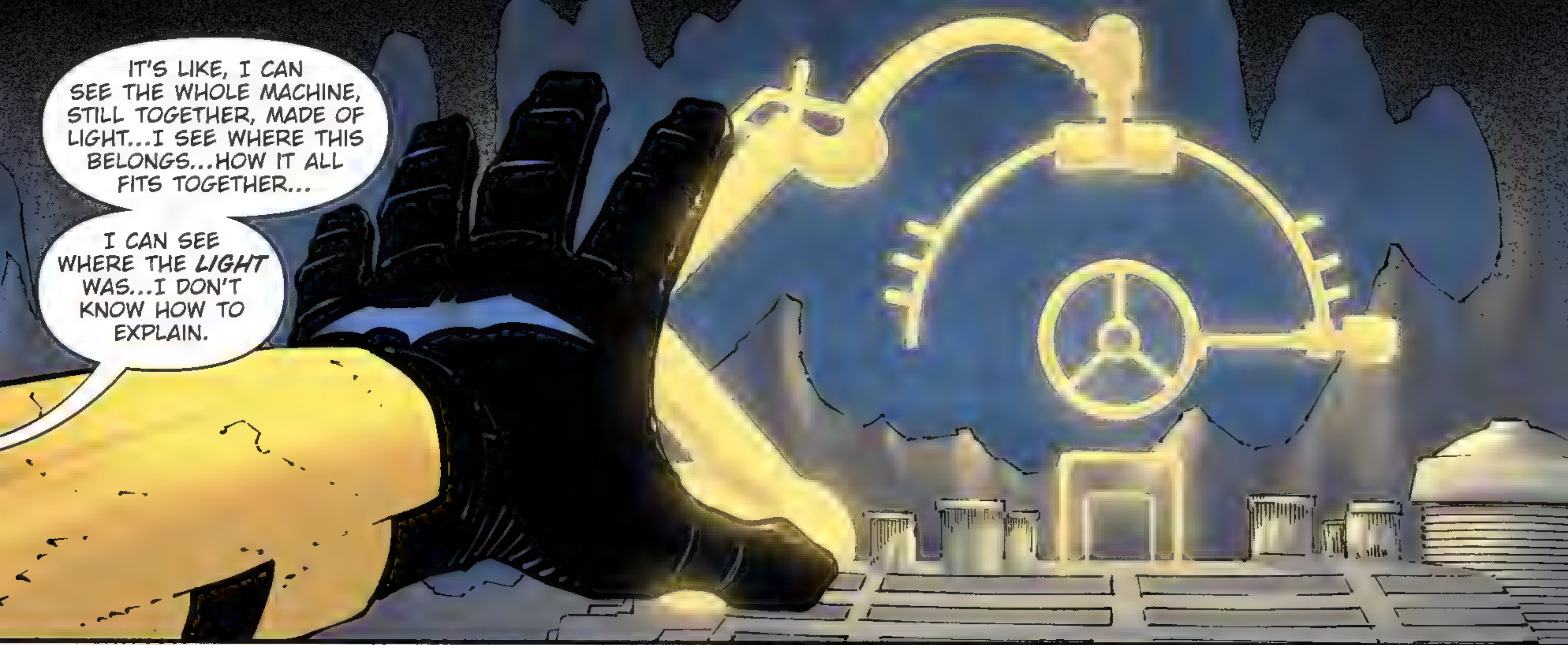
THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE THE END OF ALL OF THIS. I HAVE THE DIMENSIONAL FREQUENCY OF THE ENERGY LOCKED...AND WITH THIS DAGGER, I HAVE THE POWER TO SEE THE TRUTH AT THE HEART OF THE MYSTERY.



WHOA...

THAT DAGGER...IT'S DOING SOMETHING TO ME...





IT'S LIKE, I CAN SEE THE WHOLE MACHINE, STILL TOGETHER, MADE OF LIGHT...I SEE WHERE THIS BELONGS...HOW IT ALL FITS TOGETHER...

I CAN SEE WHERE THE *LIGHT* WAS...I DON'T KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN.



THE JOKER SAID THIS WOULD HAPPEN...

HOW COULD HE KNOW?



HAL...I KNOW THIS MAKES YOU UNCOMFORTABLE. BUT THE *NIGHT* IS GETTING *BLACKER* EVERY MINUTE. AND THIS *EVIL* IS FAR OUT OF *SIGHT*.

YEAH, BATMAN. I KNOW MY OATH...



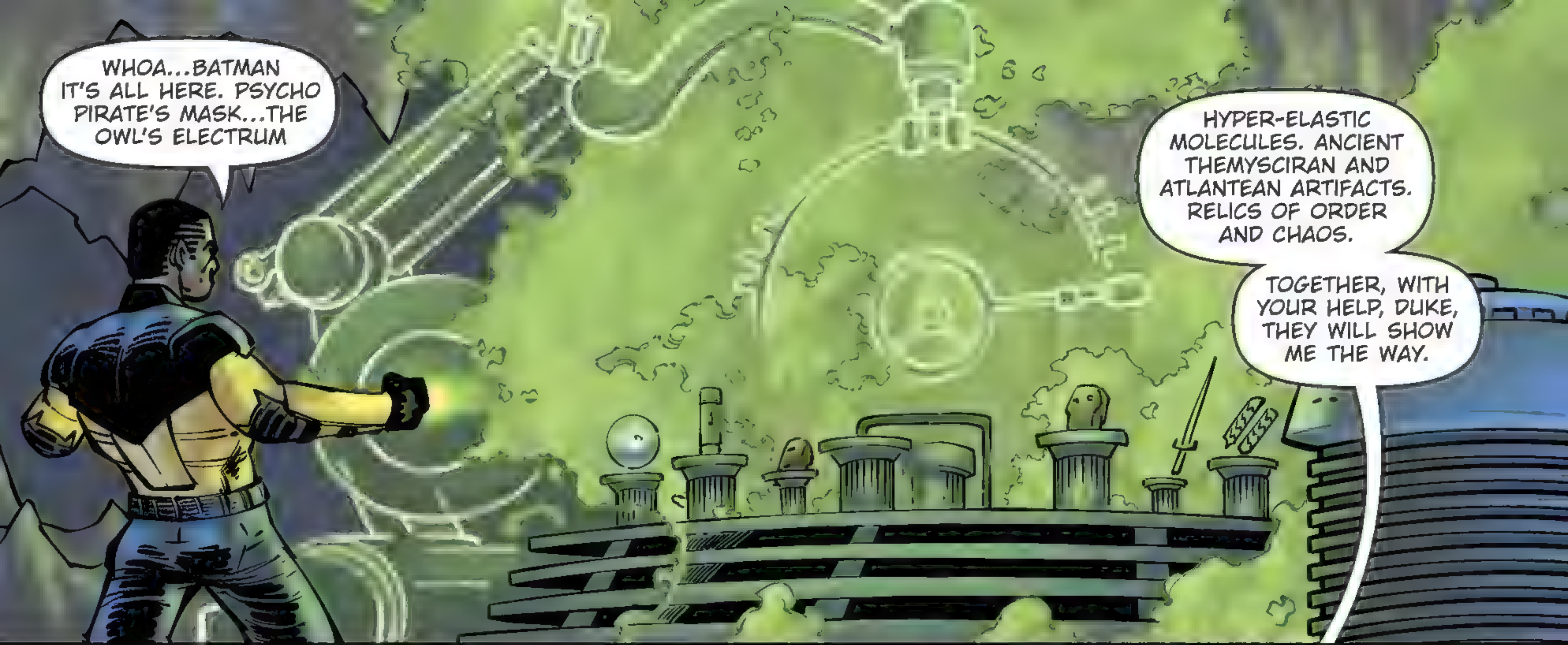
ALL RIGHT, KID. THIS DUPLICATE RING'S JUST A LOANER, OKAY? AND IF WHAT I'VE BEEN GOING THROUGH TODAY IS ANY INDICATION, THIS IS GOING TO HURT A LOT.



YOU NEED TO PUT ALL OF YOURSELF, ALL YOUR *WILL*, INTO THAT RING, AND SHOW US WHAT YOU SEE...



AAAAHHH...



WHOA...BATMAN
IT'S ALL HERE. PSYCHO
PIRATE'S MASK...THE
OWL'S ELECTRUM

HYPER-ELASTIC
MOLECULES. ANCIENT
THEMYSCIRAN AND
ATLANTEAN ARTIFACTS.
RELICS OF ORDER
AND CHAOS.

TOGETHER, WITH
YOUR HELP, DUKE,
THEY WILL SHOW
ME THE WAY.

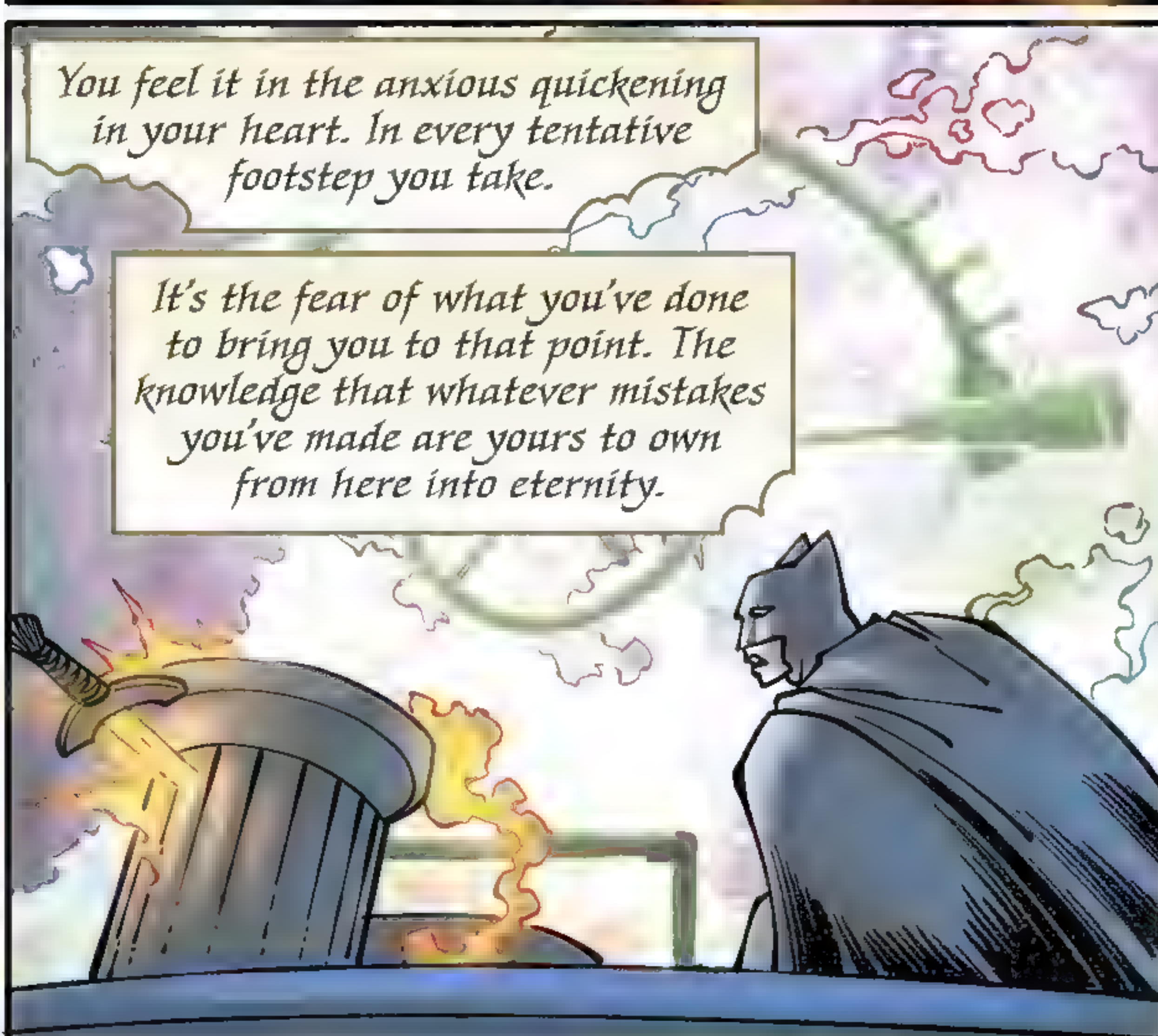


WHATEVER YOU SEE
IN THERE, BRUCE...
I'M TELLING THE
GUARDIANS. IF THIS
STUFF CAN AFFECT
OUR RINGS, THERE'S
NO TELLING HOW
POWERFUL IT
COULD BE.

I UNDERSTAND,
HAL. AND THANK
YOU.



*There is a feeling
you get at the end of
an adventure.*



*You feel it in the anxious quickening
in your heart. In every tentative
footstep you take.*

*It's the fear of what you've done
to bring you to that point. The
knowledge that whatever mistakes
you've made are yours to own
from here into eternity.*



*It is the knowledge
that there is no
way back.*

At the beginning, your story
burned white hot with possibility.
You felt the fire in your veins.
The need to know. To explore.
To understand.

And more than that, the
knowledge that you can chart
your own course toward that
greater knowledge.

That you, and only
you, control your
destiny.

But with
every step
forward,
your story
cooled and
hardened.

Pulling you
inexorably
toward a
singular ending.
An ending you
can no longer
choose.

An ending that
chooses you.

BRUCE!

--FROM THE
JOURNAL OF
CARTER HALL

BRUCE...
WHAT DID YOU
SEE...?

DARKNESS...

WHAT?

I DON'T
UNDERSTAND. I DID
EVERYTHING RIGHT...
BUT ALL I SAW WAS
DARKNESS.

NOW!
THREE-THOUSAND MILES BELOW GOTHAM CITY.

IT IS
DONE. HE HAS
STARED INTO THE
ABYSS.

AND WE
HAVE HIDDEN
WHAT LIES
WITHIN.

THE FINAL
SEAL IS
BROKEN.

AFTER
ALL THESE
GENERATIONS,
THE **SACRIFICE**
IS AT HAND.

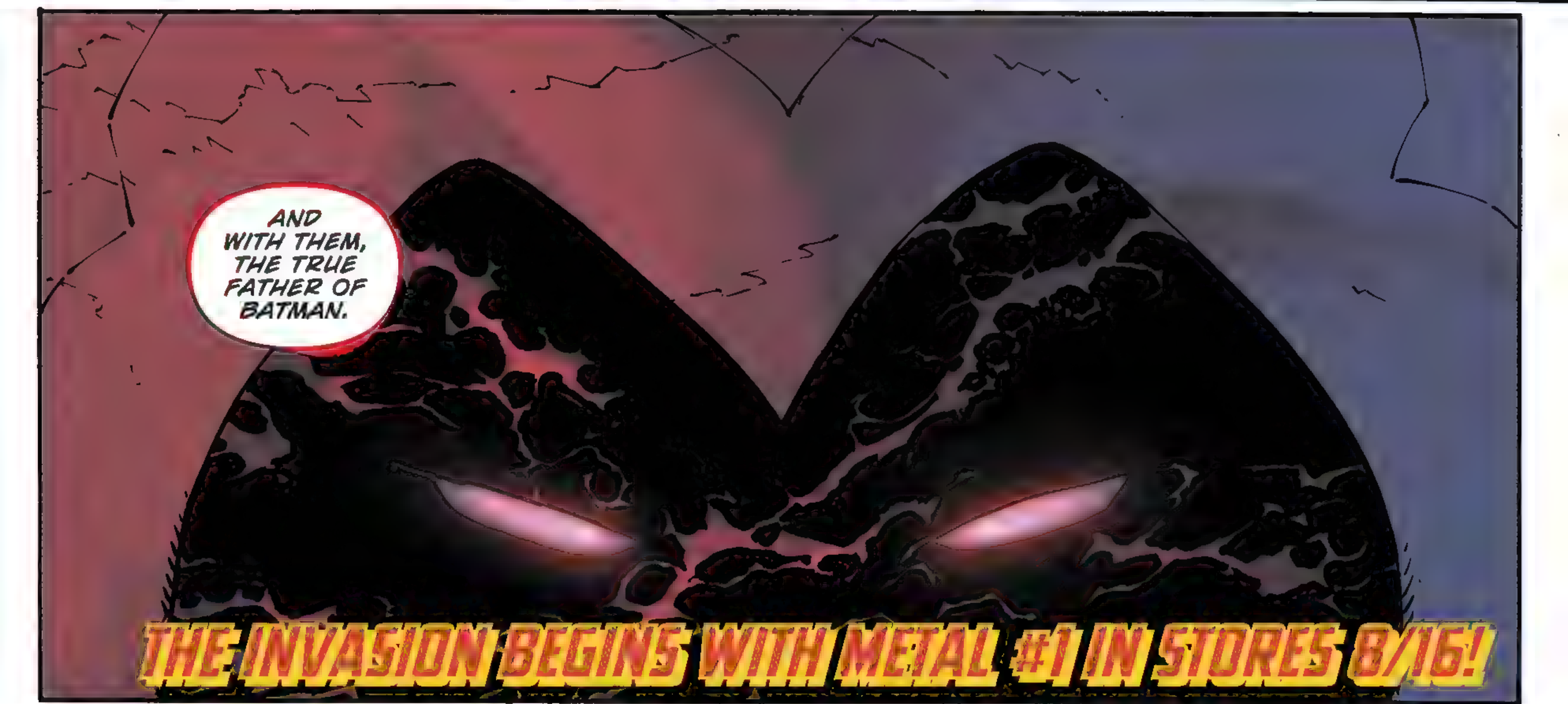
LET US
SEE THEM.

LET US SEE
WHAT HE **SHOULD**
HAVE SEEN, IF WE HAD
NOT PREPARED HIM
CORRECTLY...

THE DARK
DAYS ARE
OVER...



THE DARK
KNIGHTS ARE
COMING.



AND
WITH THEM,
THE TRUE
FATHER OF
BATMAN.

THE INVASION BEGINS WITH METAL #1 IN STORES 8/16!

**"I never had to say *I'm Batman*.
I showed up.
People knew I was Batman."**

**Adam West
1928-2017**

Thanks for being our first real hero, old chum...
from your pals at DC Comics.





MISTER MIRACLE

HE'S DYING TO ESCAPE LIFE.

HUGO AWARD-NOMINATED WRITER OF BATMAN AND VISION

TOM KING

ART BY

MITCH GERADS

MONTHLY
BEGINNING IN

AUGUST



DARK DAYS

THE CASTING

The next chapter on the road to
the epic comics event METAL

You read DARK DAYS: THE FORGE; now get ready for DARK DAYS: THE CASTING, the next chapter on the road to the summer's greatest comics event: METAL. The one-shot will be written by Scott Snyder and James Tynion IV and illustrated by DC Master Class artists Jim Lee, Andy Kubert and John Romita Jr. DARK DAYS: THE CASTING sets the stage for the epic event that reunites the *New York Times* best-selling team of Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo.

"I've been planning METAL for as long as I've been writing Batman," said Snyder. "But this is bigger than Batman. Greg and I started dropping clues during the 'Court of Owls,' continued through our Joker stories and placed our biggest hints in the run that culminated with BATMAN #50. Now we're back to tell a story that breaks everything apart. This will be the definitive project of our careers. METAL takes us in an entirely new direction. Greg and I will dig beneath the surface of all the stories we've told to find a place of terror and twisted nightmares."

"I'm looking forward to rock'n' and roll'n' together again," said Capullo. "Fans have been loud and clear; they want more from us. We're primed and ready to blow it up."

"I want METAL to be built upon the stories happening now in Rebirth and create new material that feels really modern and different," said Snyder. "And above all, it's going to be FUN. Even with terror and nightmares, it won't be grim. DARK NIGHTS: METAL will be celebratory, huge and crazy."

**Don't miss
DARK DAYS: THE CASTING
this JULY**



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